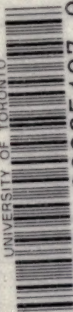


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THE MUD LARKS

THE MUD
LARKS
AGAIN
BY
CROSBIE
GARSTIN

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THE MUD LARKS AGAIN



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THE MUD LARKS AGAIN

BY

CROSBIE GARSTIN

LIEUTENANT, 1ST KING EDWARD'S HORSE

("Patlander" of *Punch*)

AUTHOR OF "THE MUD LARKS"

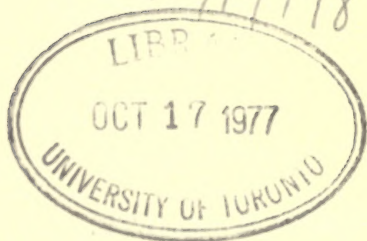
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A714M8



TO THE MEMORY
OF MY BROTHER
CAPTAIN DENIS NORMAN GARSTIN,
D.S.O., M.C.
ORDER OF ST. ANNE OF RUSSIA
(10TH HUSSARS)
KILLED IN ACTION
NEAR ARCHANGEL, RUSSIA
AUGUST 17TH, 1918

"You gallop on unfooted asphodel . . .
And wave beyond the stars that all is well."

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THE MUD LARKS AGAIN

I

A CHANGE OF FRONT

WE fell asleep with goose feathers of snow whirling against the carriage windows, and woke to see a shot-silk sea flinging white lace along a fairy coast on one side and pink and yellow villas nesting among groves of palm and orange on the other.

"Of course this sort of thing doesn't happen in real life," said Albert Edward, flattening his proboscis against the pane. "Either it's all a dream or else those oranges will suddenly light up; George Grossmith, in a topper and spats, will trip in from the O.P. side; girls will blossom from every palm, and all ranks get busy with song and prance—tra-la-la!"

The Babe kicked his blankets off and sat up. "Nothing of the sort. We've arrived in well-known Italy, that's all. Capital—Rome. Exports—old masters, Chianti and barrel-organs. Faces South and is centrally heated by Vesuvius."

We rattled into a cutting, the sides of which were decorated with posters—"Good Healt at the England," "Good Lucky at Tommy"—and drew up in a flag-festooned station, on the platform of which was a deputation of smiling *signorinas* who presented the Atkinses with postcards, fruit and cigarettes, and ourselves with flowers.

"Very *bon*—eh, what?" said the Babe as the

train resumed its rumblings. "All the same I wish we could thank them prettily and tell them how pleased we are we've come. Does anybody handle the patter?"

Albert Edward thought he did. "Used to swot up a lot of Italian literature when I was a lad; technical military stuff about the divisions of Gaul by one J. Cæsar."

"Too technical for everyday use," I objected. "A person called D'Annunzio is their best seller now, I believe."

"Somebody'd better hop off the bus at the next stop and buy a book of the words," said the Babe.

At the next halt I dodged the deputation and purchased a phrase-book with a Union Jack on the cover, entitled *The English Soldier in Italy*, published in Milan.

Among military terms, grouped under the heading of "The Worldly War," a *garetta* (sentry-box) is defined as "a watchbox," and the machine-gunner will be surprised to find himself described as "a grapeshot-man." It has also short conversations for current use.

"Have you of any English papers?"

"Yes, sir, there's *The Times* and *Tit-Bits*."

(Is it possible that the land of Virgil, of Horace and Dante, knows not *The Daily Mail*?)

"Give me, please, many biscuits."

"No, sir, we have no biscuits; the fabrication of them has been avoided by Government."

"Waiter, show me a good bed where one may sleep undisturbed."

In the train :—

"Dickens! I have lost my ticket."

"Alas, you shall pay the price of another."

A jocular vein is recommended with cabbies :—

"Coachman, are you free?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then long live liberty."

Very young subalterns with romantic notions may waste good beer-money on foreign phrase-books and get themselves ravelled in hopeless international tangles, but not old Atkins. The English soldier in Italy will speak what he has always spoken with complete success in Poperinghe, Amiens, Cairo, Salonika, Dar-es-Salaam, Bagdad and Jerusalem: to wit, English.

But to return to our train. At nightfall we left the fairy coast behind, its smiling *signorinas*, flags, flowers and fruit, and swarmed up a pile of perpendicular scenery from summer to winter. During a halt in the midst of moonlit snows our carriage door was opened and we beheld outside an Italian officer, who saluted and gave us an exhibition of his native tongue at rapid fire.

"He's referring to us," said the Babe. "Answer him, somebody; tell him we're on his side and all that."

"*Viva l' Italia*," William exclaimed promptly.

The Italian countered with a "*Viva l' Inghilterra*" and swept on with his monologue.

"Seems to want something," said Albert Edward. "Wonder if Cæsar is too technical for him."

"Read him something from *The English Soldier in Italy*," I suggested.

The Babe thumbed feverishly through the handbook. "'Let us get in; the guard has already cried'—No, that won't do. 'Give me a walk and return ticket, please'—That won't do either. 'Yes, I have a trunk and a carpet-bag'—Oh, this is absurd." He cast the book from him.

At that moment the engine hooted, the trucks

gave a preliminary buck and started to jolt forward. The Italian sprang upon the running board and, clinging to the hand-rail, continued to declaim emotionally through the window. William became alarmed. "This chap has something on his mind. Perhaps he's trying to tell us that a bridge has blown up, or that the train is moving without a movement order, or the chauffeur is drunk. For Heaven's sake somebody do something—quick!"

Thereupon Babel broke loose, each of us in his panic blazing off in the foreign language which came easiest to his tongue.

William called for a bath in Arabic. The Babe demanded champagne in French. Albert Edward declined *mensa*, while I, by the luckiest chance, struck a language which the Italian recognised with a glad yelp. In a moment explanations were over and I had swung him into the carriage and slammed the door.

The new-comer was a lieutenant of mountain artillery. He was returning from leave, had confided himself to the care of an R.T.C., had in consequence missed every regular train and wanted a lift to the next junction. That was all. I then set about to make him as comfortable as possible, wrapping him in one of the Babe's blankets and giving him his maiden drink of whisky out of William's First Field Dressing. With tears streaming down his cheeks he vented his admiration of the British national beverage.

In return he introduced me to the Italian national smoke, an endless cigar to be sucked up through a straw. Between violent spasms I implored the name and address of the maker. We were both very perfect gentlemen.

We then prattled about the War; he boasting

about the terrific depths of snow in which he did his battling, while I boasted about the Flanders mud. We broke about even on that bout. He gained a bit on mountain batteries, but I got it all back, and more, on tanks. He had never seen one, so I had it all my own way. Our tanks, after I had finished with them, could do pretty nearly anything except knit.

Defeated in the field, he turned home to Rome for something to boast about. I should see St. Peter's, he said. It was magnificent, and the Roman art treasures unsurpassable.

I replied that our cathedral at Westminster was far newer, and that the art in our National Cold Storage had cost an average of £5473 19s. 1½d. per square foot. Could he beat it?

That knocked him out of his stride for a moment, but he struggled back with some remark about seeing his Coliseum by moonlight.

I replied that at ours we had modern electric light, Murphy and Mack, Vesta Tilley and the Bioscope.

Whether he would have recovered from that I know not, for at this moment the lights of the junction twinkled in at the frosted windows and he took his departure, first promising to call in at our Mess and suffer some more whisky if in return I would crawl up his mountain and meet the chamois and edelweiss.

Later on, as I was making up my bed for the night, Albert Edward poked his head out of the cocoon of horse-blankets in which he had wound himself.

"By the way, what ungodly jargon were you and that Italian gabbling together so sociably?"

"German," I whispered; "but for the Lord's sake don't tell anybody."

II

ANTONIO GIUSEPPE

OUR squadron is at the present moment billeted in what the house-agents would describe as a "unique old-world property," a ramshackle pile which looks like a palace from the south and a workhouse from the north.

It commenced its career, back in the long ago, as a glorified week-end bungalow for Doges. In course of time it became a monastery.

When the pious monks took over they got busy with whitewash and obliterated most of the Doges' sportive mural decorations. Most, but not all.

Methinks the Abbot had tripped the boulevards in his youth and he spared some of the brighter spots of the more sportive frescoes in memory of old times and to keep his heart up during Lent. Anyhow they are still there.

To-day our long-faced chums champ their feeds in cloisters where once the good monks told their beads, and our bold sergeant boys quaff their tonics beneath a painted ceiling whereon Rackham satyrs are depicted chivvying Kirchner nymphs across a Leader landscape.

A small portion of one immense wing is inhabited by a refugee lady, who had retired in good order, haling the whole menagerie along with her, calves, fowls, children, donkey, piebald pig and all.

When first we came into residence here we heard

strange nocturnal swishings and shufflings overhead, where none should be, and attributed them to the ghost of the Abbot, who had returned from Purgatory with a bucket of lime and was striving to wash out his former lapses. Later on we discovered it was the calves, who from inscrutable motives of their own prefer living in the attics. How Mrs. Refugee hoisted them up there in the first place, and how she proposes to get them down again when they ripen, are questions she alone can answer, but will never do so because we haven't enough Italian to ask her.

The piebald pig is supported entirely by voluntary contributions, and, like many other such institutions, keeps frequent fasts. When he retreated here there was no sty to accommodate him ; but Mrs. Refugee, with the practical originality that distinguishes her, routed out a retired dog-kennel from somewhere and anchored him to it. This has had the effect of creating in him a dual personality.

Sometimes he thinks he is just fat old Dolce F. Niente the pig, and behaves as such, and one can tread all over him without disturbing his melodious slumbers. At others the collar and chain prey on his mind and he imagines he is Patriæ Defensor the trusty watch-dog, and mows down all comers.

The children and fowls are doing nicely. They speedily discover what innumerable fowls and children all the world over had discovered before them, namely, that the turtling dove is a wild beast compared with the British warrior and his war-horse, and they victimise the defenceless creatures accordingly.

The result is that the Atkinses get only what husks of their rations the children have neglected,

and the fowls only allow the hairies what oats they cannot possibly stagger away with.

Antonio Giuseppe the donkey was also a war profiteer. Commerce might stagnate, armies clash and struggle, nations bleed to death, he did not care. "*Viva la guerra!*" said Antonio Giuseppe. "As long as there is a British unit handy to dine out with I'm all for it." These sentiments, though deplorable, were not without reason, for until we came I very much doubt if he had ever had a full meal—a real rib-straining blow-out—in his life.

He was a miserable little creature, standing about a yard high by six inches broad. By tucking in his tail he could have passed for a rabbit at any fancy-dress ball. His costume was a patchwork affair of hairy tufts and bare spaces. I think he must have been laid away in a drawer without camphor at one time and been mauled by a moth.

A disreputable ragamuffin person was Antonio Giuseppe the donkey, but for all that he had a way with him, and was in his day the Light-weight Champion Diner-out of all Italy—probably of the world.

At night he reposed in the kitchen along with Mrs. Refugee, the *bambini* and fowls. The day he spent in his observation post, lurking behind a screen of mulberries and vines, keeping a watchful eye on the horses.

As soon as their nosebags were on he commenced to move stealthily towards the lines, timing himself to arrive just as the nosebags came off and the hay-nets went up. He then glided softly between the horses and helped himself. Being tiny and very discreet he frequently passed unobserved, but should the line-guard spot him he had his plan of action.

Oft-times have I seen a perspiring and blas-

phemous trooper pursuing the winged Antonio Giuseppe round the lines with a stable broom ; but when the broom descended Antonio Giuseppe was not there to receive it. He would nip under the breast-rope, slip in under one horse's belly and out between the legs of another, dodging through and round the astounded animals like a half-back through a loose scrum or a greased pig at a fair, snatching a generous contribution from each hay-net as he passed. Under this method Antonio thrived and thrived ; but the tale of splintered brooms grew and grew and the Quartermaster loved me not.

Yesterday the General intimated that he'd like to inspect us. Always eager to oblige, we licked, polished, brushed and burnished ourselves, pipe-clayed our head-ropes, pomaded our moustaches, powdered our noses and paraded.

We paraded to-day in regimental column in a field west of our palace-workhouse and sat stiff in our saddles, the cheerful sunshine glowing on leather-work, glinting on brass and steel, conscious that we could give any Beauty Chorus a run for its money.

There sounded a shrill fanfaronade of trumpets, tootling the salute, and a dazzle of gold and scarlet, like a Turner sunset, blazed into view—the General and his Staff.

At the same moment Antonio Giuseppe espied us from his observation post and, getting it into his head that we were picnicking out (it was about lunch-time), hastened to join us. As the General reached the leading squadron Antonio Giuseppe reached the near squadron and, sliding unobtrusively into its ranks, looked about for the hay-nets.

However, the Second in Command noticed his

arrival and motioned to his trumpeter. The trumpeter spurred forward and pinked Antonio Giuseppe in the hindquarters with his sword-point as a hint to him to move on. Antonio, thinking the line-guards were upon him and with a new type of broom, loosed a squeal of agony and straightway commenced his puss-in-the-corner antics in and out and round about the horses' legs. They didn't like it at all; it tickled and upset them; they changed from the horizontal to the vertical, giggled and pawed the air.

Things were becoming serious. A hee-hawing tatterdemalion donkey, playing "ring o' roses" with a squadron of war-horses, tickling them into hysterics, detracts from the majesty of such occasions and is no fit spectacle for a General. A second trumpeter joined in the chase and scored a direct prick on the soft of Antonio Giuseppe's nose as he dived out under the tail of a plunging gun-mare. Antonio whipped about and fled towards the centre squadron, ears wobbling, braying anguished S.O.S.'s. The two trumpeters, young and ardent lads, thundered after him, swords at the engage, racing each other, knee to knee, for first blood. They scored simultaneously on the butt of his tail, and Antonio, stung to the quick, shot clean through (or rather under) the centre squadron into the legs of the General's horse, tripping up that majestic animal and bringing the whole stately edifice down into a particularly muddy patch of Italy.

Tremendous and awful moment! As my groom and countryman expressed it, "Ye cud hear the silence for miles." The General did not break it. I think his mouth was too full of mud and loose teeth for words. He arose slowly out of the ooze like an old walrus lifting through a bed of seaweed

black as death, slime dripping from his whiskers, and limped grimly from the field, followed by his pallid staff proffering handkerchiefs and smelling-salts. But I understand he became distinctly articulate when he got home, and the upshot of it is that we are to be put in the forefront of the nastiest battle that can be arranged for us.

And Antonio Giuseppe the donkey, author of all the trouble, what of him? you ask.

Antonio Giuseppe the donkey will never smile again, dear reader. With his edges trimmed and "Welcome" branded across his back he may serve as a mangy doormat for some suburban maisonette, but at the present moment he lies in the mud of the parade-ground, as flat as a sole on a sand-bank, waiting for someone to roll him up and carry him away.

When a full-fed Major-General falls he falls heavily.

III

" I SPY "

I PUT my head into the Mess and discovered Albert Edward alone there cheating himself at Patience.

" My leave warrant has come and I'm off ! " said I. " If Foch should ring up tell him he'll have to struggle along by himself for a fortnight. Cheeroh ! "

" Cheeroh ! " said Albert Edward. " Give my regards to Nero, Borgia and all the boys. "

I shut the door upon him and took the road to Rome.

Arrived there I attempted to shed a card on the Pope, but was repulsed by a halberdier in fancy dress ; visited the catacombs (by the way, in the art of catacombing we latter-day sinners have nothing to learn from the early saints. Why, at Arras in 1917 we—— Oh, well, never mind now !) ; kept a solemn face while bands solemnly intoned Tipperary (under the impression it was the British National Anthem) ; bought a bushel of mosaic brooches and several million picture postcards and acted the perfect little tripper throughout.

Then one day while stepping into a hotel lift I bumped full into Wilfrid Wilcox Wilbur, stepping forth.

You have all of you read the works of Wilfrid

Wilcox Wilbur (*Passion Flowers, Purple Patches*, etc. Boost and Boom. 6s.) ; if you haven't you should, for Wilfrid is the lad to handle the soul-sob and the heart-throb and warm up cold print generally.

In pre-war days he was to be met with in London drawing-rooms about tea-time wearing his mane rather longer than is done in the best menageries, giving a very realistic imitation of a lap-dog. And now behold him in military disguise parading the Eternal City !

“ What are you doing here ? ” I gasped.

He put a finger to his lips. “ Psst ! ” Then pushing me into the lift, he ejected the attendant, turned a handle and we shot aloft. Half-way between heaven and earth he stopped the conveyance and having made quite sure we were not being overheard by either men or angels, leaned up against my ear and whispered, “ Secret Service ! ”

I was amazed. “ Not really ! ”

Wilbur nodded. “ Yes, really ! That's why I have to be so careful ; they have their agents everywhere listening, watching, taking notes.”

I felt for my pocket-case momentarily fearful that *They* (whoever *They* were) might have taken mine.

“ And do you have agents also, listening, noting, taking watches ? ” I asked.

Wilbur said he had and went on to explain that so perfect was his system that a cat could hardly kitten anywhere between the Yildiz Kiosk and Wilhelmstrasse without his full knowledge and approval. I was very thrilled, for I had previously imagined all the cloak and dagger spy business to be an invention of the magazine writer, yet here was little Wilbur, according to himself, living a

life of continuous yellow drama, more Queuxrious than fiction, rich beyond dreams of Garavice. (Publisher—"Tut-tut!" Author—"Peccavi!")

I thrilled and thrilled. "Look here," I implored, "if you are going to pull off a *coup* at any time, do let me come too!"

Wilbur demurred. The profession wasn't keen on amateurs, he explained; they were too impetuous, lacked subtlety—still if the opportunity occurred he might—perhaps—— I wrung his hand, then, seeing that bells on every landing had been in a state of uproar for some fifteen minutes and that the attendant was commencing to swarm the cable after his lift, we dropped back to earth again, returned it to him and went out to lunch.

"And now tell me something of your methods," said I, as we sat down to meat.

Wilbur promptly grabbed me by the collar and dragged me after him under the table.

"What's the matter now?" I gulped.

"Fool!" he hissed. "The waiter is a Bulgarian spy."

"Let's arrest him then," said I.

Wilbur groaned. "Oh, you amateurs, you would stampede everything and ruin all!"

I apologised meekly and we issued from cover again and resumed our meal: silently, because (according to Wilbur) the peroxide blonde doing snake-charming tricks with spaghetti at the next table was a Hungarian agent, and there was a Turk concealed in the potted palms near by.

I thrilled and thrilled and thrilled.

Then followed stirring days. Rome at that time, I gathered, was the centre of the spy industry and at the height of the sleuthing season, for they hemmed us in on every hand—according

to Wilbur. I was continually being dragged aside into the shadow of dark arcades to dodge Austrian Admirals disguised as dustmen, rushed up black alleys to escape the machinations of Bolshevick adventuresses parading as parish priests, and submerged in fountains to avoid the evil eyes of German diplomats camouflaged as flower girls—according to Wilbur.

I thrilled and thrilled and thrilled and thrilled, bought myself a stiletto and a false nose.

However, after about a week of playing trusty Watson to Wilbur's Sherlock without having effected a single arrest, drugged one courier, stilettoed a soul, or being allowed to wear my false nose once, my thrillings became less violent, and giving Wilbur the slip one afternoon, I went on the prowl alone. About four of the clock my investigations took me to Latour's. At a small marble table lapping up ices as a kitten laps cream, I beheld Temporary Second Lieut. Mervyn Esmond.

You all of you remember Mervyn Esmond, him of the spats, the eyeglass and grey top-hat, the Super-Knut of the Frivolity Theatre who used to gambol so gracefully before the many “ twinkling toes ” of the Super-Beauty Chorus, singing “ Billy of Piccadilly.” You *must* remember Mervyn Esmond !

But that was the Esmond of yore. For a long time past he has been doing sterling work in command of an Army Pierrot troupe.

I sat down beside him, stole his ice and finished it for him.

“ And now what are you doing here ? ” I asked.

“ I've come down from the line to get some new dresses for Queenie,” he replied. “ She—he, that is—is absolutely in rags, bursts a pair of corsets

and a pair of silk stockings every performance, very expensive item."

I had better explain here and now that Queenie is the leading lady in Mervyn's troupe. She—he, that is—started her—his—military career as an artillery driver, but was discovered to be the possessor of a very shrill falsetto voice and was dedicated to female impersonations forthwith.

"She—he—is round at the dressmaker's now," Mervyn went on, "wrestling with half a dozen *hysterical* mannequins. I'm getting her—him, I should say—up regardless. Listen. Dainty ninon georgette outlined with chenil stitching. Charmeuse overtunic, embroidered with musquash and skunk pom-poms. Crêpe de Chine undies interwoven with blue baby ribbon, camis——"

"Stop!" I thundered. "Do you want me to blush myself to death? I am but a rough soldier."

Mervyn apologised, wrapped himself round another ice and asked me how I was amusing myself in Tibertown.

Having first ascertained that there were no enemy agents secreted under the table or among the potted palms, I unburdened my soul to him concerning Wilbur and the *coups* that never came off.

He stared at me for a few moments, his eyes twinkling, then he leaned over the table.

"My active brain has evolved a be-aautiful plan," said he. "It's yours for another ice."

I bought it.

.

I found Wilbur sleuthing the crowd from behind a tall tumbler in the Excelsior lounge, and dragging him into the lift, hung it up half-way between here and hereafter, and whispered my great news.

“ Where, when ? ” he cried, blench-blanching.

“ In my hotel at midnight,” I replied. “ I hid in a clothes-basket and heard all. We will frustrate their knavish tricks, thou and I.”

Wilbur did not appear to be as keen as I had expected, he hummed and hawed and chatted about my amateurishness and impetuosity ; but I was obdurate, and taking him firmly by the arm led him off to dinner.

I hardly let go of his arm at all for the next five hours, judging it safer so.

Five minutes before midnight I led him up the stairs of my hotel and tiptoeing into a certain room, clicked on the light.

“ See that door over there ? ” I whispered, pointing, “ ’tis the bath-room. Hide there. I shall be concealed in the wardrobe. In five minutes the conspirators will appear. The moment you hear me shout, ‘ Hands up, Otto von Schweinhund, *le jeu est fait*,’ or words to that effect—burst out of the bathroom and collar the lady.”

I pushed Wilbur into the bathroom (he was trembling slightly, excitement no doubt,) and closed the door.

I had no sooner shut myself into the wardrobe than a man and a woman entered the room. They were both in full evening dress, the man was a handsome rascal, the woman a tall, languid beauty, gorgeously dressed. She flung herself down in a chair and lit a cigarette. The man carefully locked the door and crossed the room towards her.

“ Hansa,” he hissed, “ did you get the plans of the fortress ? ”

She laughed and taking a packet of papers from the bosom of her dress, flung it on the table.

" 'Twas easy, *mon cher*."

He caught it and held it aloft.

" Victory ! " he cried. " The Vaterland is saved ! "

He passed round the table and stood before her, his eyes glittering.

" You beautiful devil," he muttered, through clenched teeth. " I knew you could do it. I knew you would bewitch the young attaché. All men are puppets in your hands, beautiful, beautiful fiend ! "

The moment had come. Hastily donning my false nose, I flung open the wardrobe, shouted the signal and covered the pair with my stiletto. The woman screamed and flung herself into the arms of her accomplice.

" Ah, ha, foiled again ! Curse you ! " He snarled and covered me with the plans of the fortress.

I grappled with him, he grappled with me, the beautiful devil grappled with both of us ; we all grappled.

There was no movement from the bathroom door.

We grappled some more, we grappled all over the table, over the washstand and a brace of chairs. The villain lost his whiskers, the villainess lost her lovely golden wig, the hero (me) lost his false nose. I shouted the signal once more, the villain shouted it, the villainess shouted it, we all shouted it.

There was no movement from the bathroom door.

We grappled some more, we grappled over the chest of drawers, under the carpet and in and out of the towel-horse.

A muffled report rang out from somewhere about the beautiful devil.

“ For God’s sake, go easy ! ” she wheezed in my left ear. “ My corsets have went ! ”

Then, as there was still no movement from the bathroom door, and we none of us had a grapple left in us, we called “ time.”

Mervyn sat up on the edge of the bed sourly regarding the bedraggled Queenie.

“ In rags once more, twenty pounds’ worth of georgette charmeuse and ninon whatisname torn to shreds ! ” he groaned. “ Oh, you tom-boy, you ! ”

“ Come and dig these damn whalebones out of my ribs,” said she.

I staggered across the room and opening the bathroom door, peered within.

“ Any sign of our friend Sherlock, the spyhound ? ” Mervyn enquired.

“ Yes,” said I. “ He’s tumbled in a dead faint into the bath ! ”

IV

A FAUX PAS

WHEN we have finished slaying for the day, have stropped our gory sabres, hung our horses up to dry and are sitting about after mess, girths slackened and pipes aglow, it is a favourite pastime of ours to discuss what we are going to do after the War.

William, our mess president and transport officer, says frankly, "Nothing." Three years' continuous struggle to keep the mess going in whisky and soda and the officers' kit down to two hundred and fifty pounds per officer has made an old man of him, once so full of bright quips and conundrums. The moment Hindenburg chucks up the sponge off goes William to Chelsea Hospital, there to spend the autumn of his days pitching the yarn and displaying his honourable scars gained in many a bloody battle in the mule lines.

So much for William. The Skipper, who is as sensitive to climate as a lily of the hot-house, prattles lovingly during the summer months of selling ice-creams to the Eskimos, and during the winter months of peddling roast chestnuts in Timbuctoo. MacTavish and the Babe propose, under the euphonious *noms de commerce* of Vava-seur and Montmorency, to open pawn-shops among ex-munition-workers, and thereby accumulate old masters, grand pianos and diamond tiaras to export to the United States. For myself I have another plan.

There is a certain historic wood up north through which bullets whine, shells rumble and no bird sings. After the War I am going to float a company, purchase that wood and turn it into a pleasure-resort for the accommodation of tourists.

There will be an entrance fee of ten francs, and everything else will be extra.

Tea in the dug-out—ten francs. Trips through trenches, accompanied by trained guides reciting selected passages from the outpourings of our special correspondents—ten francs. At night grand S.O.S. rocket and Very light display—ten francs. While for a further twenty francs the tourist will be allowed to pick up as many souvenirs in the way of rolls of barbed wire, dud bombs and blind crumps as he can stagger away with. By this means the country will be cleared of its explosive matter and I shall be able to spend my declining years in Park Lane, or, anyway, Tooting.

Our Albert Edward has not been making any plans as to his future lately, but just now it looks very much as if his future will be spent in gaol. It happened this way. He had been up forward doing some O. Pipping. While he was there he made friends with a battery and persuaded the poor fools into doing some shooting under his direction. He says it is great fun sitting up in your O. Pip, a pipe in your teeth, a telescope clapped to your blind eye, removing any parts of the landscape that you take a dislike to.

"I don't care for that tree at A 29.b.5.8," you say to the telephone. "It's altogether too crooked (or too straight). Off with its head!" and, hey presto! the offending herb is not. Or, "That hill at C 39.d.7.4" is quite absurd; it's ridiculously lop-sided. I think we'll have a valley there in-

stead." And lo! the absurd excrescence goes west in a puff of smoke.

Our Albert Edward spent a most enjoyable week altering the geography of Europe to suit his taste. Then one morning he made a trifling error of about thirty degrees and some few thousand yards and removed the wrong village.

"One village looks very much like another, and what are a few thousand yards this way or that in a war of world-wide dimensions? Gentlemen, let us not be trivial," said our Albert Edward to the red-hatted people who came weeping to his O. Pip. Nevertheless some unpleasantness resulted, and our Albert Edward came home to shelter in the bosom of us, his family.

The unpleasantness spread, for twenty-four hours later came a chit for our Albert Edward, saying if he had nothing better to do would he drop in and swop yarns with the General at noon that day? Our Albert Edward made his will, pulled on his parade boots, drank half a bottle of brandy neat, kissed us farewell and rode off to his doom. As he passed the borders of the camp The O'Murphy uncorked himself from a drain, and, seeing his boon-companion faring forth a-horse, abandoned the ratstrafe and trotted after him.

A word or two explaining The O'Murphy. Two years ago we were camped at one end of a certain damp dark gully up north. Thither came a party of big marines and a small Irish terrier, bringing with them a long naval gun, which they covered with a camouflage of sackcloth and ashes and let off at intervals. Whenever the long gun was about to fire the small dog went mad, bounced about behind the gun-trail like an indiarubber ball, in an ecstasy of expectation. When the great gun

boomed he shrieked with joy and shot away up the gully looking for the rabbit. The poor little dog's hunt up and down the gully for the rabbit that never had been was one of the most pathetic sights I ever saw. That so many big men with such an enormous gun should miss the rabbit every time was gradually killing him with disgust and exasperation.

Meeting my groom one evening I spoke of the matter to him, casually mentioning that there was a small countryman of ours close at hand breaking his heart because there never was any rabbit. I clearly explained to my groom that I was suggesting nothing, dropping no hints, but I thought it a pity such a sportsman should waste his talents with those sea-soldiers when there were outfits like ours about, offering all kinds of opportunities to one of the right sort. I again repeated that I was offering no suggestions and passed on to some other subject.

Imagine my astonishment when, on making our customary bi-weekly trek next day, I discovered the small terrier secured to our tool-limber by a piece of baling-wire, evidently enjoying the trip and abusing the limber-mules as if he had known them all his life. Since he had insisted on coming with us there was nothing further to be said, so we christened him "The O'Murphy," attached him to the strength for rations and discipline, and for two years he has shared our joys and sorrows, our billets and bully-beef, up and down the land of Somewheres.

But it was with our Albert Edward he got particularly chummy. They had the same dislike of felines and the same taste in biscuits. Thus when Albert Edward now rode by, ears drooping, tail tucked in (so to speak), *en route* to the shambles, The

O'Murphy saw clearly that here was the time to prove his friendship, and trotted along behind. On arriving at H.Q. the comrades shook paws and bade each other good-bye. Then Albert Edward stumbled within and The O'Murphy hung about outside saucing the brass-collared Staff dogs and waiting to gather up what fragments remained of his chum's body after the General had done with it. His interview with the General our Albert Edward prefers not to describe ; it was too painful, too humiliating, he says. That a man of the General's high position, advanced age and venerable appearance could lose his self-control to such a degree was a terrible revelation to Albert Edward. "Let us draw a veil over that episode," he said.

But what happened later on he did consent to tell us. When the General had burst all his blood-vessels, and Albert Edward was congratulating himself that the worst was over, the old man suddenly grabbed a Manual of Military Law off his desk, hurled it into a corner and dived under a table, whence issued scuffling sounds, grunts and squeals. "See that?" came the voice of the General from under the table. "Of all confounded impudence!—did you see that?"

Albert Edward made noises in the negative. "A rat, by golly!" boomed the venerable warrior, "big as a calf, came out of his hole and stood staring at me. Damn his impudence! I cut off his retreat with the manual and he's somewhere about here now. Flank him, will you?"

As Albert Edward moved to a flank there came sounds of another violent scuffle under the table, followed by a glad whoop from the General, who emerged rumpled but triumphant.

"Up-ended the waste-paper basket on him,"

he panted, dusting his knees with a handkerchief, "And now, me lad, what now, eh?"

"Fetch a dog, sir," answered Albert Edward, mindful of his friend The O'Murphy. The General sneered, "Dog be blowed! What's the matter with the old-fashioned cat? I've got a plain tabby with me that has written standard works on ratting." He lifted up his voice and bawled to his orderly to bring one Pussums. "Had the old tabby for years, me lad," he continued; "brought it from home—carry it round with me everywhere; and I don't have any rat troubles. Orderly!"

"Fellers come out here with St. Bernard dogs, shot-guns, poison, bear-traps and fishing-nets and never get a wink of sleep for the rats, while one common cat like my old Pussums would—— Oh, where is that confounded feller?"

He strode to the door and flung it open, admitting, not an orderly but The O'Murphy, who nodded pleasantly to him and trotted across the room, tail twinkling, love-light shining in his eyes, and deposited at Albert Edward's feet his offering, a large dead tabby cat.

Albert Edward remembers no more. He had swooned.

V

MON REPOS

ALBERT EDWARD and I are on detachment just now. I can't mention what job we are on because Hindenburg is listening. He watches every move made by Albert Edward and me and disposes his forces accordingly. Now and again he forestalls us, now and again he don't. On the former occasions he rings up Ludendorff, and they make a night of it with beer and song; on the latter he pushes the bell violently for the old German God.

The spot Albert Edward and I inhabit just now is very interesting; things happen all round us. There is a tame balloon tied by a string to the back garden, an ammunition column on either flank and an infantry battalion camped in front. Aeroplanes buzz overhead in flocks and there is a regular tank service past the door. One way and another our present location fairly teems with life; Albert Edward says it reminds him of London. To heighten the similarity we get bombed every night.

Promptly after Mess the song of the bomb-bird is heard. The searchlights stab and slash about the sky like tin swords in a stage duel; presently they pick up the bomb-bird—a glittering flake of tinsel—and the racket begins. Archibalds pop, machine guns chatter, rifles crack, and here and there some optimistic sportsman browns the Milky

Way with a revolver. As Sir I. Newton's law of gravity is still in force and all that goes up must come down again, it is advisable to wear a parasol on one's walks abroad.

In view of the heavy lead-fall Albert Edward and I decided to have a dug-out. We dug down six inches and struck water in massed formation. I poked a finger into the water and licked it. "Tastes odd," said I, "brackish or salt or something."

"We've uncorked the blooming Atlantic, that's what," said Albert Edward; "cork it up again quickly or it'll bob up and swamp us." That done, we looked about for something that would stand digging into. The only thing we could find was a molehill, so we delved our way into that. We are residing in it now, Albert Edward, Maurice and I. We have called it "*Mon Repos*," and stuck up a notice saying we are inside, otherwise visitors would walk over it and miss us.

The chief drawback to "*Mon Repos*" is Maurice. Maurice is the proprietor by priority, a mole by nature. Our advent has more or less driven him into the hinterland of his home and he is most unpleasant about it. He sits in the basement and sulks by day, issuing at night to scrabble about among our boots, falling over things and keeping us awake. If we say "Boo! Shoo!" or any harsh word to him he doubles up the backstairs to the attic and kicks earth over our faces at three-minute intervals all night.

Albert Edward says he is annoyed about the rent, but I call that absurd. Maurice is perfectly aware that there is a war on, and to demand rent from soldiers who are defending his molehill with their lives is the most ridiculous proposition I ever heard of. As I said before, the situation is most

unpleasant, but I don't see what we can do about it, for digging out Maurice means digging down "*Mon Repos*," and there's no sense in that. Albert Edward had a theory that the mole is a carnivorous animal, so he smeared a worm with carbolic tooth-paste and left it lying about. It lay about for days. Albert now admits his theory was wrong; the mole is a vegetarian, he says; he was confusing it with trout. He is in the throes of inventing an explosive potato for Maurice on the lines of a percussion grenade, but in the meanwhile that gentleman remains in complete mastery of the situation.

The balloon attached to our back garden is very tame. Every morning its keepers lead it forth from its abode by strings, tie it to a longer string and let it go. All day it remains aloft, tugging gently at its leash and keeping an eye on the War. In the evening the keepers appear once more, haul it down and lead it home for the night. It reminds me for all the world of a huge docile elephant being bossed about by the mahout's infant family. I always feel like giving the gentle creature a bun.

Now and again the Boche birds come over disguised as clouds and spit mouthfuls of red-hot tracer-bullets at it, and then the observers hop out. One of them "hopped out" into my horse lines last week. That is to say his parachute caught in a tree and he hung swinging, like a giant pendulum, over my horses' backs until we lifted him down. He came into "*Mon Repos*" to have bits of tree picked out of him. This was the sixth plunge overboard he had done in ten days, he told us. Sometimes he plunged into the most embarrassing situations. On one occasion he dropped clean through a bivouac roof into a hot

bath containing a Lieutenant-Colonel, who punched him with a sponge and threw soap at him. On another he came fluttering down from the blue into the midst of a labour company of Chinese coolies, who immediately fell on their faces, worshipping him as some heavenly being, and later cut off all his buttons as holy relics. An eventful life.

VI

"FLY, GENTLE DOVE"

WE were told off for a job of work over the bags not long ago. The Staff sent us some pigeons with their love, and expressed the hope that we'd drop them a line from time to time and let them know how the battle was raging, and where. (The Staff live in constant terror that one day the War will walk completely away from them and some unruly platoon bomb its way up Unter den Linden without their knowing a thing about it.)

Next morning we duly pushed off, and in the course of time found ourselves deep in Bocheländ holding a sketchy line of outposts and waiting for the Hun to do the sporting thing and counter. More time passed, and as the Hun showed no signs of getting a move on we began to look about us and take stock.

Personally I felt that a square meal might do something towards curing a hollow feeling that was gnawing me beneath the belt. As I was rummaging through my haversack the pigeon-carrier approached and asked for the book of rules.

Now to the uninitiated, I have no doubt, pigeon-flying sounds the easiest game in the world. You just take a picture-postcard, mark the spot you are on with a cross, add a few words, such as, "Hoping this finds you in the pink, as it leaves

me at present—I don't think," insert it in the faithful fowl's beak, say, "Home, John," and in a few minutes it is rattling into the General's letter-box. This is by no means the case. Pigeons are the kittlest of cattle. If you don't treat them just so they will either chuck up the game on the spot or hand your note to Hindenburg. To avoid this a book of the rules is issued to pigeon-carriers, giving instructions as to when and how the creatures should be fed, watered, exercised, etc.

On this occasion I felt through my pockets for the book of the rules and drew blank. "What's the matter with the bird, anyhow?" I asked.

"Looks a bit dahn-'earted," said the carrier; "dejected-like, as you might say."

"Seeing you've been carrying it upside down for the last twenty-four hours it isn't to be wondered at," said my Troop Sergeant; "blood's run to its head, that's what."

"Turn it the other way up for a bit and run the blood back again," I suggested.

"Exercise is what it wants," said my sergeant firmly.

"By all means exercise it, then," said I.

The carrier demurred. "Very good, sir—but how, sir?"

"Ask the sergeant," said I. "Sergeant, how do you exercise a pigeon? Lunge it, or put it through Swedish monkey motions?"

The sergeant rubbed his chin stubble.

"Can't say I remember the official method, sir; one might take it for a walk at the end of a string, or——"

"These official pigeons," I interposed, "have got to be treated in the official manner or they won't work; their mechanism becomes deranged. We had a pigeon at the Umpteenth Battle of

Wipers and upset it somehow. Anyway, when we told it to buzz off and fetch reinforcements, it sat on a tree licking its fluff and singing, and we had to throw mud at it to get it to shift. Where it went to then goodness only knows, for it has never been seen since. I am going to do the right thing by this bird."

I thereupon sent a galloper to the next outpost, occupied by the Babe and Co., asking him the official recipe for exercising pigeons. The answer came back as follows :—

"Ask Albert Edward. All I know about 'em is that you mustn't discharge birds of opposite sex together as they stop and flirt.

"P.S.—You haven't got such a thing as a bit of cold pudden about you, guv'nor, have you? I'm all in."

I sent the galloper galloping on to Albert Edward's post.

"Don't discharge birds after sunset," ran his reply; "they're afraid to go home in the dark—that's all I recollect. Ask the skipper.

"P.S.—Got a bit of bully beef going spare? I'm tucked up something terrible."

I sighed and sent my messenger on to the Skipper, inquiring the official method of exercising pigeons. Half an hour later his answer reached me—

"Don't know. Try eating 'em. That's what I'm doing with mine."

While on the subject of carrier-pigeons, I may mention that one winter night I was summoned to Corps H.Q. Said a Red Hat: "We are going to be rude to the Boche at dawn and we want you to go over with the boys. When you reach your objectives just drop us a pigeon to say so. Here's a chit, take it to the pigeon loft and get a good nippy fowl. Good night and good luck."

I found the pigeon-fancier inside an old London omnibus which served for a pigeon-loft, spoon-feeding a sick bird. A dour Lancastrian, the fancier studied my chit with a sour eye, then, grumbling that he didn't know what the army was coming to turning birds out of bed at this hour, he slowly climbed a ladder and, poking his head through a trap in the roof, addressed himself to the pigeons.

“That you, Flossie? No, you can't go with them tail feathers missing to the General's cat. Jellicoe—no, you can't go neither, you've 'ad a 'ard day out with them tanks. Nasty cough you've got, Gaby; I'll give you a drop of 'ot for it presently. You're breathin' very 'eavy, Joffre; been over-eatin' yourself again, I suppose—couldn't fly a yard. Eustace, you're for it.”

He backed down the ladder, grasping the unfortunate Eustace, stuffed it in a basket and handed it to me.

“I hope this is a good bird,” said I, “nippy and all that?”

The fancier snorted, “Good bird? Nothing can't stop 'im, barrages, smoke, nothing. 'E's deserved the V.C. scores of times over; 'e's the best bird in the army, an' don't you forget it, sir.”

I promised not to, caught up the basket and fled.

I reached the neighbourhood of the line at about 2 a.m. It was snowing hard and the whole front was sugared over like a wedding-cake, every track and landmark obliterated. For some hours I groped about seeking Battalion H.Q., tripping over hidden wire, tobogganning down snow-masked craters into icy shell-holes, the inimitable Eustace with me. Finally I fell head-first into a dug-out

inhabited by three ancient warriors, who were sitting round a brazier sucking cigarettes. They were Brigade Scouts, they told me, and were going over presently. They were also Good Samaritans, one of them, Fred, giving me his seat by the fire and a mug of scalding cocoa, while his colleagues, Messrs. Alf and Bert, attended to Eustace, who needed all the attention he could get. I caught snatches of their conversation here and there: "Shall us toast 'im over the brazier a bit, Alf?" "Wonder if a drop o' rum would 'earten 'im?" "Tip it into his jaws when 'e yawns, Bert."

At length Eustace's circulation was declared restored and the three set about harnessing themselves for the war, encasing their legs in sand-bags, winding endless mufflers round their heads and donning innumerable odd overcoats, so that their final appearance was more that of apple-women than scouts.

We then set out for the battle, Bert leading the way towards the barrage which was cracking and banging away in yellow flashes over the Boche lines.

Presently we heard a muffled hail ahead.

"Wazzermatter, Bert?" Alf shouted.

"They've quit—slung their 'ook," came the voice.

Fifty yards brought us bumping up against Bert, who was prodding through the débris of a German post with the point of his bayonet.

"So the swines have beat it?" said Fred. "Any soovenirs?"

"Nah!" said Bert, spitting, "not a blinkin' 'am-sandwich."

"Is this really our objective?" I asked.

"It is, sir," Bert replied. "Best sit down and

keep quiet ; the rest of the boys will be along in a jiffy, and they'd bomb their own grandmothers when they're worked up."

I put my hand in the basket and dragged Eustace forth. He didn't look up to V.C. form. Still I had explicit orders to release him when our objective was reached, and obedience is second nature with me.

I secured my message to his leg, wished him luck and tossed him high in the air. A swirl of snow hid him from view.

I didn't call at H.Q. when I returned. I went straight home to bed and stayed there. As they did not send for me and I heard no more about it I conjectured that the infallible Eustace had got back to his bus and all was well. Nevertheless I had a sort of uneasy feeling about him. I heard no more of it for ten days, and then, out walking one afternoon, I bumped into the pigeon-fancier. There was no way of avoiding the man ; the lane was only four feet wide, bounded by nine-foot walls with glass on top. So I halted opposite him, smiled my prettiest and asked after Eustace. "So glad he got home all right," said I ; "a great bird that."

The fancier glared at me, his sour eyes sparkling, his fists opening and shutting. I felt that only bitter discipline stood between them and my throat.

"Ay, sir," said he, speaking with difficulty, "he's a great bird, but not the bird he was. He got home all right, but it wasn't till yesterday, very stiff in the legs from walking every step o' the way."

VII

THERE AND BACK

MY batman is a man with a grievance. He Msquats outside my tent all day moodily burnishing my buttons and swears and sighs, sighs and swears. In the words of my groom and countryman, "Ye'd think there'd be a black dog atin' the hear't in his shest the way he is, the poor scut."

I learn that he has given out that if he sees a crump coming he'll "Blinkin' well wait for it," that he presented his bosom chum with a black eye gratis, and is declining beer. All this sounds like love, but isn't. This is the way of it.

Last week after nineteen months' undetected misbehaviour in the tented field, he was granted ten days' leave. He departed radiant as a May morn, groomed and glittering from spurs to cap badge.

Within three days he was back again.

According to his version of the affair, he reached the coast in good order and was given a hearty meal by some ladies in a canteen but lost it in mid-Channel. Owing to mines, air raids, and things both boat and train were scandalously late, but in the end he arrived at Victoria at six a.m. still in good order. Outside the station were a number of civilians waiting for soldier relatives. One of them, a small sandy man in a black bowler and tie, very respectable (connected with the retail undertaking trade, my batman says,) accosted him and enquired whether anything had been seen of

his brother Charlie, a territorial bombardier who was supposed to be coming by that train, but had not materialized.

My batman could give no information and they fell into a discussion as to what could have happened to Charlie, whether he might have missed the train or fallen off the boat. My batman favoured the latter theory: he had felt very like it himself, he said. One thing led to another and presently the sandy man said:

"Well, what about it?" lifting his elbow suggestively, and winking.

My batman said he didn't mind if he did, so they adjourned to a little place near by that the sandy man knew of, and had one or two, the sandy man behaving like a perfect gentleman throughout, standing drink for drink, cigar for cigar.

At seven a.m. or thereabouts, the sandy man excused himself on the plea of business (which he explained was very healthy owing to the inclemency of the weather) and betook himself off, my batman returning to Victoria to retrieve his pack.

By this time his order was not so good as it had been, owing, he thinks, to (a) the excitement of being home again, hearing civilians all talking English and seeing so many intact houses at once; (b) the bereaved state of his stomach. Whatever it was he navigated to the station with difficulty and "comin' over all dizzy like," reclined on a platform bench and closed his eyes.

When he opened them again it was to see the white cliffs of Albion rapidly disappearing over the stern rail of a trooper. He closed his eyes again and told himself he was dreaming, but not for long—he might deceive his reason but not his stomach.

He soon saw that he was in mid-Channel going

back to France. He sat up on deck and shouted for someone to stop the ship.

"'E's come to, Bill," said a familiar voice at his side, and turning, he beheld the cheerful countenances of Frederick Wilkes and William Buck, two stalwarts of "ours" who were returning from leave.

My batman asked Frederick Wilkes what he thought he was doing of.

"Saving you from six months in clink for over-staying your leaf, ol' dear!" Frederick replied cheerfully. "Me and Bill found you on the station, blind to the world, so we loaded you on the train and bringed you along. Pretty job we had of it, too, getting you past the red-caps, you slopping about like a lu-natic."

"Clink! Overstayin' my leaf!" shrilled my batman. "Gor-blimy! I ain't 'ad no leaf—I only just landed!"

"Delerious again, Bill," said Frederick, and Bill nodded. "Of course you've had your leaf, an' a wonderful good leaf, too, by the looks of you—blind to the world from start to finish, not knowin' dark from daylight."

"I'll tell the first R.T.O. I see all about it when I land—you perishin' kidnappers!" foamed my batman.

"Ho no, you won't!" said Frederick, complacently. "We aren't going to 'ave you runnin' about in your light-'eaded condition disgracin' the regiment—are we, Bill?"

"Not likely," William Buck replied. "We're going to take you back with us, safe and sound, if we 'ave to break your neck to do it, an' don't you forget it, ol' man!"

I think it is extremely improbable that my batman ever will.

VIII

HOT AIR

THE scene is a base camp behind the Western Front. In the background is a gravel pit, its brow fringed with pines. On the right-hand side is a black hut ; against one wall several cast-iron cylinders are leaning ; against another several stretchers ; behind it a squad of R.A.M.C. orderlies are playing pitch and toss for profit and pleasure. On the left-hand side is a cemetery.

On the turf in the centre of the stage are some two hundred members of the well-known British family, Atkins. The matter in hand being merely that of life and death those in the rear ranks are whiling away the time by playing crown and anchor. Their less fortunate comrades in the prominence of the front ranks are " havin' a bit o' shut eye "—in other words are fast asleep sitting up, propped the one against the other.

Before them stands a Bachelor of Science disguised as a Second Lieutenant. From the green and black brassard about his arm and the *attar de chlorine* and *parfum de phosgène* which cling about him in a murky aureole one would guess him to be connected with the Gas Service. And one would be quite correct ; he is.

Lecturer : " Ahem ! Pay attention to me, please ; I am going to give you a little chat on Gas. When you go up the line one of two things must in-

evitably happen to you ; you will either be gassed or you will not. If you are not gassed strict attention to this lecture will enable you to talk as if you had been. On the other hand, if you are gassed it will enable you to distinguish that variety to which you succumbed, and will be most instructive.

" There are more sorts of gas than one. There is the Home or Domestic Gas, which does odd jobs about the house at a bob a time, and which out here is fed to observation balloons to get them off the earth. There is Laughing Gas, so called from the fun the dentist gets out of his victims while they are under its influence ; and lastly there is Hun Gas, which is not a bit amusing.

" Three varieties of gas are principally employed by the Hun. The first of these is Chlorine. Chlorine smells like a strong sanitary orderly or weak chloride of lime. The second on our list is Mustard Gas, so called because it smells like garlic. Everything that smells of garlic is not Mustard Gas, however, as a certain British Division which went into the line alongside some of our brave Southern allies regretfully discovered after they had been sweltering in their masks for thirty-six long, long hours.

" The third and last is Phosgene. Phosgene has a greenish whitish yellowish odour all its own, reminiscent of decayed vegetation, mouldy hay, old clothes, wet hides, burnt feathers, warm mice, polecats, dead mules, boiled cabbage, stewed prunes, sour grapes, or anything else you dislike.

" As all these gases have a depressing effect on the consumer if indulged in too freely the War Office has devised an effective counter-irritant, the scientific wonder of the age, the soldier's friend

and *multum in parvo*—in short, the Respirator Box. Here you will observe I have a respirator-box as issued to the troops.

“ There are other kinds with lace trimmings and seasonable mottoes worked in coloured beads for the use of the Staff ; but they do not concern us. Let us now examine the ordinary respirator-box. What do we discover ? A neat canvas satchel, knapsack or what-not, which will be found invaluable for the storage of personal knick-knacks, such as soap, knives and forks, socks, iron rations, mouth-organs, field-marshal’s batons, etc. Within the satchel (what-not or knapsack) we discover a rubber sponge-bag pierced with motor goggles, a clothes-peg, a foot of garden hose, a baby’s teether (chewers among you will find this a comforting substitute for gum), a yard or two of strong twine (first-aid to the braces), a tube of Anti-Dimmer (use it as tooth-paste, your smile will beam more brightly), and a record card, on which you are invited to inscribe your name, age, vote and clubs, your golf, polo and ludo handicaps, complaints as to the cooking or service, and any sunny sentiments or epigrams that may occur to you from time to time.

“ Should you be in the line and detect the presence of hostile gas in large numbers your first action should be to don your respirator-box and your second to give the alarm. The donning of the respirator is done by the best people in five motions :—

“ 1. Remove the cigarette, chewing-gum or false teeth from the mouth and place it (or them) behind the ear (or ears).

“ 2. Tear the sponge-bag out of the knapsack (what-not or satchel) and slap it boldly on the face as you would a mustard-plaster.

" 3. Pin it to your nose by means of the clothes-peg.

" 4. Work the elastics well into the back hair.

" 5. Swallow the teether and carry on with deep breathing exercises, as done by Swedes, seafarers and such.

" The respirator once in position, pass the good news on to your comrades by performing *fortissimo* on one of the numerous alarms with which every nice front line is liberally provided. But please remember that gas alarms are for gas only, and do not let your natural exuberance or love of music carry you away, as it is liable to create a false impression ; witness the case of some of our high-spirited Colonials, who, celebrating a national festival (the opening of the whippet racing-season in New South Wales) with a full orchestra of Klaxon and Strombos horns, rattles, gongs, shell-cases, tin-cans, sackbuts, psalteries and other instruments of musick, sent every living soul in an entire army area stampeding into their smell-hats, there to remain for forty-eight hours without food, drink or benefit of clergy.

" Having given you full instructions as to the correct method of entering your respirators I will now tell you how to extricate yourselves. You must first be careful to ascertain that there is no gas left about. Tests are usually made (1) with a white mouse, (2) with a canary.

" If the white mouse turns green there is gas present ; if it don't there ain't. If the canary wags his tail and whistles ' Gee ! ain't it dandy down in Dixie ! ' all is well, but if it wheezes " The End of a perfect Day " and moults violently, beware, beware ! If through the negligence of the Quartermastering Department you have not been equipped with either mice or canaries do not start

sniffing for gas yourselves, but remember that your lives are of value to your King and country and send for an officer. To have first sniff of all gas is one of an officer's privileges; he hasn't many, but this is one of them and very jealously guarded as such. If an officer should catch you snuffing up all the gas in the neighbourhood he will be justifiably peevish.

"Now, having given you all the theory of anti-gas precautions, we will indulge in a little practice. When I shout the word 'Gas!' my assistants will distribute a few smoke bombs among you, and every man will don his respirator in five motions and wend his way towards the gas-chamber, entering it by the south door and leaving it by the north. Is that quite clear? Then get ready. Gas!"

Four or five N.C.O. Instructors suddenly pop up out of the gravel pit and bombard the congregation with hissing smoke grenades. The front ranks wake up, spring to their feet in terror and leg it for safety at a stretched gallop, shedding their respirators for lightness' sake as they flee. The rear ranks, who, in spite of themselves, have heard something of the lecture, burrow laboriously into their masks. Some wear them as hats, some as ear-muffs, some as chest-protectors.

The smoke rolls over them in heavy yellow billows.

Shadow shapes, hooded like Spanish inquisitors, may be seen here and there crouched as in prayer, struggling together or groping blindly for the way out. One unfortunate has his head down a rabbit-hole, several blunder over the edge of the gravel pit and are seen no more.

There is a noise of painful laboured breathing as of grampuses in deep water or pigs with asthma,

The starchy N.C.O. Instructors close on the helpless mob and with muffled yelps and wild waving of arms herd them towards the south door of the gas chamber, push them inside and shoot the bolts.

The R.A.M.C. Orderlies are busy hauling the bodies out of the north door, loading them on stretchers and trotting them across to the cemetery, at the gates of which stands the Base Burial Officer beaming welcome.

The lecturer, seeing the game well in progress, lights a pipe and strolls home to tea.

IX

THE CONVERT

I FOUND No. 764, Trooper Hartley, W.J., in the horse lines, sitting on a hay-bale perusing a letter which seemed to give him some amusement. On seeing me he arose, clicked his spurs and saluted. I returned the salute, graciously bidding him carry on. We go through the motions of officer and man very punctiliously, William and I. In other days, in other lands, our relative positions were easier.

The ceremonies over I sat down beside him on the hay-bale, and we became Bill and Jim to each other.

"Did you ever run across Gustav Müller in the old days?" William inquired, thumbing a fistful of dark Magliesburg tobacco into his corn-cob incinerator. "'Mafoota,' the niggers called him, a beefy man with an underdone complexion."

"Yes," I said, "he turned up in my district on the Wallaby in 1913 or thereabouts, with nothing in the world but a topee, an army overcoat and a box of parlour magic. Set up as a wizard in Chala's kraal. Used to produce yards of ribbon out of the mouths of the afflicted, and collapsible flower-pots out of their nostrils—casting out devils, you understand. Was scratching together a very comfortable practice; but he began to dabble in black politics, so I moved him on. An entertaining old rogue; I don't know what became of him."

William winked at me through a cloud of blue tobacco smoke. "I do. He went chasing a rainbow's end North of the Lakes, and I went along with him. You see, Gustav's great-aunt Gretchen appeared to him in a dream and told him there was alluvial gold in a certain river bed, tons of it, easy washing, so we went after it. We didn't find it; but that's neither here nor there; a man must take a chance now and again, and this was the first time Gustav's great-aunt had let him down. She'd given him the straight tip for two Melbourne Cups and a Portuguese lottery in her time. Some girl, great-aunt Gretchen! Anyway there was Gustav and me away up at the tail-end of Nowhere, with the boys yapping for six months' back pay, and we couldn't have bought a feed of hay for a nightmare between us. We just naturally had to do something, so——"

"So you just naturally took to poaching ivory," said I. "I know you. Go on."

William grinned. "Well, a man must live, you know. How'sodever we struck a bonanza vein of *m'jufu* right away and piled up the long white nuggets in a way that would drive you to poetry. A Somali Arab took the stuff from us on the spot, paying us in cattle at a fifty-per-cent discount, which was reasonable enough, seeing that he ran ninety per cent of the risks. Everything sailed along like a beautiful dream. The elephants was that tame they'd eat out of your hand, and you could stroll out and bowl over a dozen of the silly blighters before breakfast if you felt in the mood. The police hadn't got our address as yet. The only competitor that threatened got buckshot in his breeches, which changed his mind and direction for him very precipitous. The industry boomed and boomed.

" ' Another year of this,' says I to myself, ' and I'll retire home and grow roses, drive a pony-trap and be a churchwarden.'

" Then one day the Arab headman blows into camp, and squatting outside our tent, commences to lamentate and pipe his eye in a way that would make you think he'd ate a skinful of prickly pears.

" ' What's biting you, Bluebell? ' I asked.

" ' *Allah akbar!* God is good but business is rotten,' says he, and pitches a woeful yarn how that columns of Askaris was marching thither and thence, poking their flat noses in where they wasn't invited; *Inglische* gunboats were riding every wave, scaring seven bells out of the coast dhows, and consequently commerce was sent to blazes and a poor man couldn't get an honest living nohow. The long and short of it was that ivory smuggling was off for the period of the War.

" ' What war, you scum? ' says Gustav, pricking his freckled ears. ' Who's warring? '

" ' The *Inglische* and Germans, of course,' says the Arab. ' Didn't the B'wana know? '

" ' No, the B'wana doesn't,' says I; " ' our private Marconi outfit is broke down owing to the monkeys swinging on the wires. Now trot home, you barbarous ape, while me and my colleague throws a ray of pure intellect on the problem. *Bassi.*'

" So he soon dismisses at the double and is seen no more in them vicinities.

" ' Well, partner,' says I to Gustav, ' this is a fair knock-out—what? '

" But Gustav, he grumbles something I couldn't catch and walks off into the bush with his head down, afflicted with thought.

" He didn't come in for supper, so I scoffed his share and turned in.

"At moonrise I thought I heard a bull elephant trumpeting like he was love-sick, but it wasn't. It was Gustav coming home singing the *Wacht am Rhein*. He brings up opposite my bed.

" 'Oh, give over and let the poor lions and leopards snatch some sleep,' says I.

" 'I was born in Sherman,' says he.

" 'Don't let that keep you awake, ole man,' says I. 'What saith the prophet?' 'If a cat kittens on a fishplate they ain't necessarily herrings.' "

" 'I'm a Sherman,' says he.

" 'You've been so long with white men that nobody'd know it,' says I. 'Forget it, and I won't tell on you. Why, you ain't seen Sherman these thirty years, and you wouldn't know a square-head if you was to trip over one. Go to bed, Mr. Caruso.'

" 'Well, I'm going to be a mighty good Sherman now, to make up for lost time,' says he grim-like, 'and in case you got any objections I'll point out that you've the double express proximitous to your stomach.'

"He had me bailed up all right. Arguments weren't no use with the cuss. 'I'm a Sherman' was all he'd say, and next day we starts to hoof it to Germany territory, me promenading in front calling Gustav every name but his proper one, and him marching behind, prodding me in the back with the blunderbuss. He disenjoyed that trip even more than I did; he had to step behind me all day for fear I'd dodge him into the bush; and he sat up all night for fear the boys would rescue me. He got as red-eyed as a bear and his figure dropped off him in bucketfuls.

"At the end of a month we crossed the border and hit the trail of the Deutscher—burnt villages

everywhere, with the mutilated bodies of women and piccaninnies lying about, stakes driven through 'em. Waugh!

" 'Are you still a Sherman?' I asks; but Gustav says nothing; he'd gone a bit white about the gills all the same. Then one morning we tumbles into one of their columns and the game is up. I was given a few swipes with a *kiboko* for welcome and hauled before the Commander, a little short cove with yellow hair, a hand-carved jaw and spectacles. He diagnosed my case as serious, prescribed me some more *kiboko*, and I was hove into a grass hut under guard, pending the obsequies.

" The Officers called Gustav a good sport, gave him a six-by-four cigar and took him off to dinner. I noticed he looked back at me once or twice. So I sits down in the hut and meditates on some persons' sense of humour, with a big Askari buck padding it up and down outside, whiling away the sunny hours with a bit of disembowelling practice on his bayonet.

" A couple of days flits by while the column is away spreading the good word with fire and stake. Then on the third night I hears a scuffle outside the hut, and the Askari comes somersaulting backwards through the grass wall like as if an earthquake had butted him in the brisket. He gave a couple of kicks and stretched out like as if he was tired.

" 'Whist! Is that you, Bill?' comes a whisper through the hole.

" 'What's left of me,' says I. 'Who are you?'

" 'Me—Gustav,' says the whisperer.

" 'What's the antic this time? Capturing me again?' says I.

" 'No, I'm rescuing you now,' says he.

" 'The devil you are,' says I, and with that I glided out through the hole and followed him on my stomach. A sentry gave tongue at the scrub-edge, but Gustav rose up out of the grass and bumped him behind the ear and we went on.

" 'Well, you're a lovely quick-change artist, capturing a bloke one moment and rescuing him the next,' says I presently. 'What's come over you? Ain't you a Sherman no more?'

" Gustav groans as if his heart was broke. 'I've been away thirty years. I didn't know they was like that; I'd forgotten. Oh, my Gawd, what swine!' He spits like a man that has bit sour beer, and we ran on again."

"Didn't they chase you?" I asked.

William nodded.

"But they couldn't catch two old bush-bucks like us, and the next day we fell in with a British column that was out hunting them. 'Twas a merry meeting. Gustav enlisted with the Britishers on the spot."

William tapped the travel-soiled letter in his hand. "This is from him. He's down in Nairobi, wounded. He says he's sitting up taking nourishment, and that great-aunt Gretchen has appeared to him again and showed him a diamond pipe in the Khali Hari, which will require a bit of looking into *après la guerre*—if there ever is any *après*."

X

A REST CURE

NOT long ago a notice appeared in Part II Orders to the effect that our Army had established a Rest Home at X where invalid officers might be sent for a week's recuperation.

Now X is a very pleasant place, consisting of a crowd of doll's-house chalets set between cool pine-woods and the sea.

The chalets are labelled variously "Villa des Roses," "Les Hirondelles," "Sans Souci," and so on, and in the summertimes of happier years swarmed with comfortable bourgeois, bare-legged children and Breton nannas; but in these stern days a board above the gate of "Villa des Roses" announces that the Assistant-Director of Agriculture may be found within meditating on the mustard-and-cress crop, while "Les Hirondelles" and "Sans Souci" harbour respectively the Base Press Censor (whose tar-brush hovered over this perfectly priceless article) and a platoon of the D.L.O.L.R.R.V.R. (Duchess of Loamshire's Own Ladies' Rabbit Rearing Volunteer Reserve).

X, as I said before, is an exceedingly pleasant place; you may lean out of the window o' mornings and watch the D.L.O.L.R.R.V.R.'s Sergeant-Majoress putting her platoon through Swedish monkey motions, and in the afternoons you can recline on the sands and watch them sporting in the glad sea-waves (telescopes protruding from the

upper windows of " Villa des Roses " and " Sans Souci " suggesting that the A.D.A. and the B.P.C. are similarly employed).

The between-whiles may be spent lapping up ozone from the sea, resin from the pine-woods, and champagne cocktails which Marie-Louise mixes so cunningly in the little café round the corner ; and what with one thing and another the invalid officer goes pig-jumping back to the line fit to mince whole brigades of Huns with his bare teeth.

X, you will understand, is a very admirable institution, and when we heard about this Rest Home we were all for it and tried to cultivate fur on the tongue, capped hocks and cerebral meningitis ; but the Skipper hardened his heart against us and there was nothing doing.

Then one morning MacTavish came over all dithery-like in the lines, fell up against a post, smashed his wrist-watch and would have brained himself had that been possible.

He picked himself up, apologised for making a fool of himself before the horses, patched his scalp with plaster from his respirator, borrowed my reserve watch " Pretty Polly," and carried on.

" Pretty Polly " can do two laps to any other watch's one without turning a hair-spring. Externally she looks very much like any other mechanical pup the Ordnance sells you for eleven francs net ; her secret lies in her spring, which, I imagine, must have been intended for " Big Ben," but sprang into the wrong chassis by mistake.

At all events as soon as it is wound up it lashes out left and right with such violence that the whole machine leaps with the shock of its internal strife and hops about on the table after the manner of a Mexican dancing bean, clucking like an ostrich that has laid twins.

It will be gathered that my "Pretty Polly" is not the ultimate syllable in the way of accuracy, but as MacTavish seemed to want her and had been kind to me in the way of polo-sticks, I handed her over without a murmur.

The same afternoon MacTavish came over dithery again, dived into a heap of bricks and knocked himself out for the full count.

We put him to bed and signalled the Vet. The Vet reported that MacTavish's temperature was well above par and booming. He went on to state that MacTavish was suffering from P.U.O. (which is Spanish for "flu") and that he probably wouldn't weather the night.

The Skipper promptly 'phoned O.C. Burials, inviting him to dine next evening, and Albert Edward wired his tailor, asking what was being worn in headstones.

William, our Mess President, took up a position by the sick man's side in hopes he would regain consciousness for long enough to settle his mess-bill, and the rest of us spent the evening recalling memories of poor old Mac, his many sterling qualities, etc.

However, next morning a batman poked his head into the Mess and said could Mr. MacTavish have a little whisky, please, he was fancying it, and anyway you couldn't force none of that there grool down him not if you was to use a drenching bit.

At noon the batman was back to say that Mr. MacTavish was fancying a cigarette now, also a loan of the gramophone and a few cheerful records.

The Skipper promptly 'phoned postponing O.C. Burials, and Albert Edward wired his tailor, changing his order to that of a canary waistcoat.

That evening MacTavish tottered into the Mess

and managed to surround a little soup, a brace of cutlets and a bottle of white wine without coming over dithery again.

But for all that he was not looking his best ; he weaved in his walk, his eye was dull, his nose hot, his ear cold and drooping, and the Skipper, gazing upon him, remembered the passage in Part II. Orders and straightway sat down and applied that MacTavish be sent to X at once, adding such a graphic pen-picture of the invalid (most of it copied from a testimonial to somebody's backache pills) as to reduce us to tears and send MacTavish back to his bed badly shaken to hear how ill he'd been.

The Skipper despatched his pen-picture to H.Q. and forgot all about it, and so did H.Q. apparently, for we heard nothing further, and in due course forgot all about it ourselves, and in the meanwhile MacTavish got back into form, and MacTavish in form is no shrinking lily, be it said.

He has a figure which tests every stitch in his Sam Browne, a bright blue eye, and a complexion which an external application of mixed weather and an internal application of tawny port has painted the hue of the beetroot.

Then suddenly, like a bomb from the blue, an ambulance panted up to the door and presented a H.Q. chit to the effect that the body of MacTavish be delivered to it at once to bear off to X.

The Skipper at the time was out hacking and Albert Edward was in charge ; he sent an orderly flying to MacTavish, who rolled in from his tent singing " My Friend John " at the top of his voice and looking more like an over-fed beetroot than ever.

" Dash it all, I don't want to go to their con-founded mortuary," he shouted ; " never felt fitter in my life. I can't go ; I won't go ! "

"You'll have to," said Albert Edward ; "can't let the Skipper down after that pen-picture he wrote ; the Staff would never believe another word he said. No, MacTavish, my son, you'll have to play the game and go."

"But, you ass, look at him," wailed the Babe ; "look at his ruddy, ruby, tomato-ketchup, plum-and-apple complexion. What are you going to do about that ?"

"I'll settle his complexion," replied Albert Edward grimly ; "tell his man to toss his tooth-brush into the meat-waggon ; and you, Mac, come with me."

He led the violently protesting MacTavish into the kitchen. The cook tells me Albert Edward pounded two handfuls of flour into MacTavish's complexion and filled his eye-sockets up with coal-dust, and I quite believe the cook, for in five minutes' time I came on Albert Edward dragging what I at first took to be the body of a dead Pierrot down the passage towards the waiting ambulance, at the same time exhorting it to play the game and wobble for the Skipper's sake.

The wretched MacTavish, choking with flour and blinded with coal-dust, wobbled like a Clydesdale with the staggers.

I saw a scared R.A.M.C. orderly bound out of the car and assist Albert Edward to hoist MacTavish aboard, trip him up and pin him down on a stretcher. Then the ambulance coughed swiftly out of sight.

The allotted week passed but no MacTavish came bounding back to us like a giant refreshed with great draughts of resin, and we grew anxious ; which anxiety did not abate when, in reply to the Skipper's inquiries, the Rest Home authorities wired denying all knowledge of him,

Goodness knows what we should have done if a letter from MacTavish himself had not arrived next morning, to say that he had lain on his back in the ambulance digging coal-dust out of his eyes and coughing up flour till the car stopped, not, to his surprise, at the Rest Home, but at a Casualty Clearing Station.

Some snuffling R.A.M.C. orderlies bore him tenderly to a tent and a doctor entered, also snuffling. MacTavish is of the opinion that the whole of the medical staff had P.U.O., and the doctor was the sickest of the lot and far from reliable.

At all events, on seeing MacTavish's face, he ejaculated a bronchial "Good Lord!" and tearing MacTavish's tunic open, stuck a trumpet against his tummy and listened for the ticks.

Apparently he heard something sensational, for he wheezed another "Good Lord!" and decorated MacTavish with a scarlet label.

Within an hour our hero found himself on board a Red Cross train *en route* for the coast.

There were a lot of cheerful wounded on the bus, getting all the soup and jelly they wanted; but MacTavish got only lukewarm milk and precious little of that. From scraps of hushed conversation he caught here and there he gathered that his life hung by a thread.

He was feeling very bewildered and depressed, he said, but, remembering his duty to the Skipper, played the game and kept body and soul together on drips of jelly surreptitiously begged from the cheerful wounded.

Next morning he found himself in hospital in England, where he still remains. He says he has been promoted from warm milk to cold slops, but is still liable to die at any moment, he understands.

He has discovered that he was sent home with "galloping heart disease," but nobody in the hospital can get even a trot out of it, and boards of learned physicians sit on him all day long, their trumpets planted on his tummy listening for the ticks.

MacTavish says he thinks it improbable that they ever will hear any ticks now, for the excellent reason that he threw the cause thereof—my "Pretty Polly," to wit—out of the window the day he arrived.

In a postscript he adds that he considers he has played the game far enough, and that if the Skipper doesn't come and bail him out soon he'll bite the learned physicians, kiss the nurses, sing "My Friend John" and disgrace the Regiment for ever.

XI

THE HARRIERS (I)

THE Boche having lately done a retreat—
—“strategic retirement,” “tactical adjustment,” “elastic evasion,” or whatever Ludendorff is calling it this week—in plain words the Boche, having gloriously trotted backwards off a certain slice of France, Albert Edward and I found ourselves attached to a Corps H.Q. operating in a wilderness of grass-grown fields, ruined villages and smoking châteaux.

One evening Albert Edward loitered up to the hen-house I was occupying at the time and chatted to me through the wires as I shaved.

“Put up seventeen hares and ten covey of partridges visiting outposts to-day—take my advice and scrap that moustache while you’re about it, it must be a heavy drain on your system—and twenty hares and four covey riding home. Do you find lathering the ears improves their growth, or what?”

“The country is crawling with game,” said I, ignoring his personalities, “and here we are hanging body and soul together on bully and dog biscuit.”

“Exactly,” said Albert Edward, “and in the meanwhile the festive *lapin* breeds and breeds. Has it ever occurred to you that, if something isn’t done soon, we’ll have Australia’s sad story over again here in Picardy? Give the rabbits a chance

and in no time they'll have eaten off all the crops in France. Why, on the Burra I've seen——”

“One moment,” said I; “if I listen to your South Australian rabbit story again you've got to listen to my South African locust yarn; it's only fair.”

“Oh, shut up,” Albert Edward growled; “can't you understand this question is deadly serious?”

“Best put the Tanks on to 'em then,” I suggested; “they'd enjoy themselves, and the Waterloo Cup wouldn't be in it—Captain Monkey-Wrench's brindled whippet, ‘Sardine Tin,’ 6 to 4; Major Spanner's ‘Pig Iron,’ 7 to 2; even money the field.”

“Your humour is a trifle strained,” said Albert Edward; “if you're not careful you'll crack a joke at the expense of a tendon one of these days.”

“Look here,” said I, wiping the blood off my safety-razor, “you're evidently struggling to give expression to some heavy brain wave; out with it.”

“What about a pack of harriers?” said Albert Edward. “There must be swarms of sportive tykes about, faithful Fidos that have stuck to the dear old homestead through thick and thin, also refugee animals that follow the sweet-scented infantry cooks. I've got my old hunting-horn; you've got your old crop; between the two we ought to be able to mobilize 'em a bit and put the wind up these darn hares. I'm going to try anyway. I may say I look on it as a duty.”

“Looked on in that light it's a sacred duty,” said I; “and—er—incidentally we might reap a haunch of hare out of it now and again, mightn't we?”

“Incidentally, yes,” said Albert Edward, “and a trifle of sport into the bargain—incidentally.”

So we set about collecting a pack there and then by offering our servants five francs per likely dog and no questions asked.

No questions were asked, but I have a strong suspicion that our gentlemen were up all night and that there were dark deeds done in the dead of it, for the very next evening my groom and countryman presented us with a bill for forty-five francs.

The dogs, he informed us, were kennelled "in a little shmall place the like of an ice-house" at the northern extremity of the château grounds, and that "anyway a blind man himself couldn't miss them wid the screechin' an' hollerin' they are afther raisin' be dint of the confinement."

I had an appointment with the Q. Staff (to explain why I had indented for sixty-four horse rations while only possessing thirty-two horses, the excuse that they all enjoyed very healthy appetites apparently not sufficing), so Albert Edward went forth to inspect the pack alone.

He came into Mess very late, looking hot and dishevelled.

"My word, they've looted a blooming menagerie," he panted in my ear; "still, couldn't expect to pick Pytchley puppies off every bush, I suppose."

"What have they got, actually?" I inquired.

"Two couple of Belgian light-draught dogs—you know, the kind they hitch on to any load too heavy for a horse—an asthmatic beagle, an anæmic bloodhound, a domesticated wolf, an unfrocked poodle, and a sort of dropsical pug."

"What on earth is the pug for?" I asked.

"Luck," said Albert Edward. "Your henchman says 'them kind of little dogs do be bringing ye luck,' and backs it up with a very convincing

yarn of an uncle of his in Bally-something who had a lucky dog—'as like this wan here as two spits, except maybe for the least little curliness of the tail'—which provided complete immunity from ghosts, witches' evil and ingrowing toe-nails. I thought it cheap at five francs."

"But, good Lord, that lot'll never hunt hares," I protested.

"Won't they?" said Albert Edward grimly. "With the only meal they'll ever see prancing along in front of them, and you and me prancing along behind scourging 'em with scorpions, I rather fancy they will. By the way, I know you won't mind, but I've had to shift your bed out under the chestnut-tree; it's really quite a good tree as trees go."

"But why can't I stop in my hen-house?" I objected.

"Because I've just moved the pack there," said he.

"But why?" I went on. "What's the matter with the ice-house?"

"That's just it," he hissed in my ear; "it isn't an ice-house—never was; it's the De Valcourt family vault."

The next day being propitious, we decided to hold our first meet that evening, and issued a few invitations. The Veterinary Bloke and the Field Cashier promised to show up, likewise the Padre, once the sacredness of our cause had been explained to him.

At noon "stables" Albert Edward reported the pack in fine fettle. "Kicking up a fearful din and look desperate enough to hunt a holy angel," said he. "At five o'clock, me lad, Hark forrard! Tally-ho! and Odds boddikins!"

However at 4.45 p.m., just as I was mounting,

he appeared in my lines wearing slacks and a very downcast expression.

"Wash-out," he growled; "they've been fed and are now lying about, blown up and dead to the world."

"But who the devil fed them?" I thundered.

"They fed themselves," said Albert Edward.

"They ate the blooming lucky dog at half-past four."

We therefore postponed the hunt until the morrow; but cannibalism (so cannibals assure me), once indulged in, becomes as absorbing as morphia or jig-saws, and at two-fifteen the next afternoon my groom reported the beagle to have gone the way of the pug, and the pack once more dead to the world.

There was nothing for it but to postpone the show yet again, and tie up each hound separately as a precaution against further orgies.

However it seemed to have become a habit with them, for the moment they were unleashed on the evening of the third day they turned as one dog upon the poodle.

I wiped the bloodhound's nose for him with a deft swipe of my whip lash, and Albert Edward's charger anchored the domesticated wolf by treading firmly on its tail, all of which served to give the fugitive a few seconds' start; and then a wave of mad dog dashed between our horses' legs and was on his trail screaming for gore.

The poodle heard the scream and did not dally, but got him hence with promptitude and agility. He streaked across the orchard, leading by five lengths; but the good going across the park reduced his advantage. He dived through the fence hard pressed and, with the bloodhound's hot breath singeing his tail feathers, leaped into the

back of a large farm-cart which happened, providentially for him, to be meandering down the broad highway.

In the shafts of the cart was a sleepy fat Percheron mare. On the seat was a ponderous farmeress, upholstered in respectable black and crowned with a bead bonnet. They were probably making a sentimental excursion to the ruins of their farm. I know not ; but I do know that the fat mare was suddenly shocked out of a pleasant drowse to find herself the centre of a frenzied pack of wolves, bloodhounds and other dog-hooligans, and, not liking the look of things, promptly bolted.

Albert Edward and I dropped over the low hedge to see the cart disappearing down the road in a whirl of dust pursued by our vociferous harriers.

The fat farmeress, her bonnet wobbling over one ear, was tugging manfully at the reins and howling to Saint Lazarus of Artois to put on the brakes. Over the tail-board protruded the head of the poodle, yelping derision at his baffled enemies.

People will tell you Percherons cannot gallop ; can't they ? Believe me that grey mare flitted like a startled gazelle. At all events she was too good for our pack, whom we came upon a mile distant, lying on their backs in a ditch, too exhausted to do anything but put their tongues out at us, while far away we could see a small cloud of dust careering on towards the horizon.

" God help the Traffic Controlman at the next corner," Albert Edward mused ; " he'll never know what struck him. Well, that was pretty cheery while it lasted, what ? To see that purler the Padre took over the garden-wall was alone worth the money."

"Oh, well, I suppose we'd best herd these perishers home to kennels while they're still too weak to protest. Come on."

"And in the meanwhile the festive *lapin* breeds and breeds," said Albert Edward.

XII

THE HARRIERS (II)

ALBERT EDWARD and I were seated on a log outside the hen-house which kennelled our pack when we perceived Algy, the A.D.C., tripping daintily towards us. Albert Edward blew a kiss. "Afternoon, Algy. How *chic* he looks in his pink and all! Tell me, do people ever mistake you for a cinema attendant and give you pennies?"

"Afternoon, Algy," said I. "Been spending a strenuous morn carrying the old man's respirator—with his lunch inside?"

For answer Algy tipped me backwards off the log, and sitting down in my place, contemplated our hounds for some seconds.

"And are these the notorious Hare-'em Scare-ems?" he inquired.

I nodded. "Yessir; absolutely the one and only pack of harriers operating in the war zone. Guaranteed gun-broke, shell-shocked, shrapnel-pitted and bullet-bitten."

Algy sniffed. "What's that big brute over in the corner, he of the crumpled face and barbed smile? Looks like a bloodhound."

"Is a bloodhound," said Albert Edward. "If you don't believe me step inside and behave like raw rump steak for a moment."

Algy pointed his cane. "And that creature industriously de-lousing itself? That's a wolf, of course?"

"Its wolfery is only skin-deep," said I. "A grey gander all but annihilated it yesterday. In my opinion it's a sheep in wolf's clothing."

Algy wagged his cane, indicating the remaining two couples.

"And these? What breed would you call them?"

Albert Edward grunted. "You could call them any breed you like and be partly right. We've named them 'The Maconochies,' which, being interpreted, meaneth a little of everything."

"And how many hares have you killed?" Algy inquired.

"We haven't exactly killed any as yet," said I, "but we've put the breeze up 'em; their *moral* is very low."

"Well, my bold Nimrods," said Algy, "I'm sorry to say the game is up."

"What do you mean by 'game'?" objected Albert Edward. "I've told you before that this is a serious attempt to avert a plague of rodents. Why, in Australia I've seen——"

Algy held up his hand.

"I know, I know. But some people who have not enjoyed your harrowing Colonial experience are a trifle sceptical. Listen. Last evening, as I was driving home with the old man through Vaux-le-Tour, whom should I see but you two sportsmen out on the hillside riding down a hare, followed at some distance by three mounted bargees——"

"The Padre, the Field Cashier and O.C. Bugs," Albert Edward explained. "We're making men of 'em. Go on."

—"followed at a still greater distance," continued Algy, "by a raging band of mongrels. By the way, don't you get your hunt the wrong way round, the cart before the horse, so to speak? I

always thought it customary for the hounds to go first."

"In some cases the hare wouldn't know it was being hunted if they did," said I. "This is one of them. Forge ahead."

"Well, so far so good; the old gent was drowsing in his corner and there was no harm done."

"So you gave him a dig in the ribs, I suppose, and bleated, 'Oh, look at naughty boys chasing ickle bunny wabbit!' " sneered Albert Edward.

Algy wagged his head. "Not me. You woke him up yourself, my son, by tootling on your little tin trumpet. He heard it through his dreams, shot up with a 'Good Lord, what's that?' popped his head out of the window and saw the brave cavalcade reeling out along the sky-line like a comic movie. He drank in the busy scene, then turned to me and said——"

Albert Edward interrupted. "I know exactly what he said. He said, 'Algy, me boy, that's the spirit. *Vive le sport!* How it reminds us of our young days in the Peninsular! Oft-times has our cousin of Wellington remarked to us how Waterloo was won on the playing——'"

Algy cut off the flow and continued with his piece. "He said to me, 'God bless my soul, if those young devils aren't galloping a hare!' I said, 'Sir, they maintain that they are doing good work by averting a threatened plague of rodents, a state of affairs which has proved very detrimental to the Anti-podes.'

"'Threatened plague of grandmothers!' replied the old warrior. 'They're enjoying themselves, that's what they're doing—having a splendid time. Mind you, I've no objection to you young chaps amusing yourselves *in secret*, but this is too damn flagrant altogether. Just imagine the hullabaloo

in the House if word of these goings-on got home. "B.E.F. enjoying themselves! Don't they know there's a war on? *Cherchez le général* and off with his head!" Trot round and see your dog-fancying friends and tell 'em that if they're fond of good works I recommend crochet.' Thus the General. I must be off now, got to take the old bird up to have a peep at the War. Good-bye."

Algy tripped daintily off home again, twirling his cane and whistling cheerfully. Sourly we watched him depart.

"I believe that youth positively revels in spreading gloom," Albert Edward growled. "Oh, well, I suppose we'll have to get rid of the dogs now. Orders is orders."

"But do you think they'll go?" I asked. "We've been feeding 'em occasionally of late."

"We'll herd 'em down to where they can get wind of the infantry cooks," said Albert Edward; "once they sniff the rare old stew they'll forget all about us."

Accordingly an hour later we released our pack from the hen-house for the last time. They immediately gave chase to an errant tabby kitten, which threw off a noise like many siphons and shot up a tree, baffling them completely. We speedily herded them out of the château grounds, Albert Edward ambling in front, wringing mournful music out of his horn, and I bringing up the rear, snapping my whip-cracker under the sterns of the laggards. We had no sooner left the park for the open grass country beyond when up jumped a buck hare, right from under our feet, and away went the pack rejoicing, bass and falsetto.

Albert Edward tugged his excited mare to a standstill. "Look at those blighters!" he shouted. "Hunting noses down in pukka style for the first

time, just because they know we can't follow them. Oh, this is too much ! ”

“ I don't see why we shouldn't follow them at a distance,” said I. “ We can pretend there's no connection—there is no connection really, we didn't lay 'em on. They're hunting on their own. We're just out for a ride.”

Albert Edward winked an eye at me and gave his mare her head. The pack by this time was well across the plain, the wolf leading, noisily supported by the Maconochies and the bloodhound. Thrice the hare turned clear and squatted, but, thanks to the blood dog's infallible nose, he was ousted each time and pushed on, failing visibly. He made a sharp curve towards the windmill, and Albert Edward and I topped the miller's fence in time to see the Maconochies roll him over among the weeds. We also saw something on the highway behind the mill which we had not previously noticed, namely a grey Limousine. On a fallen tree by the wayside sat the General, his face as highly coloured as his hat. Towards us down the garden-path tripped Algy, twirling his cane and whistling cheerily. Albert Edward groaned.

“ Something in the demeanour of yon youth tells me he beareth our death-warrants. Here, you hold the horses while I feed the guillotine. This is by far, far the best thing that I have ever done.”

He slung his reins and tottered to his doom. I watched him approach within five yards of the old man when a strange thing happened. The General suddenly uttered a loud cry and, leaping to his feet, commenced to dance up and down the road, tearing and belabouring himself and swearing so outrageously that I had difficulty in holding the horses. His chauffeur and Algy rushed to his side, and they and Albert Edward

grouped in a sympathetic circle while he danced and raved and beat himself in their midst. Presently the air seemed to be full of flying tunics, shirts, camisoles, etc., and a second later I beheld the extraordinary spectacle of a Lieutenant-General dancing practically nude (excepting for his cap and boots) in the middle of a French highway, while two subalterns and a private smacked him all over, and most heartily. For nearly a minute it continued, and then he seemed to get himself under control and was led away by Algy to his car, the chauffeur following, retrieving apparel off trees and bushes. Albert Edward, one quivering smirk, wobbled up and took his reins. "By Jove! saved again. He can't very well bite the hand that spanked him, can he?"

"But what on earth was the matter?" I asked. "A fit, religious mania, a penance—what?"

"He sat on a waspodrome," said Albert Edward, "and they got on his tail."

XIII

THE CAMERA CANNOT LIE

WHEN I was young I was extremely handsome. I have documentary evidence to prove as much. There is in existence a photograph of a young gentleman standing with his back to a raging seascape, one hand resting lightly on a volume of Shakespeare, which in turn is supported by a rustic table. The young gentleman has wide innocent eyes, a rosebud mouth and long golden curls (the sort poor dear old Romney used to do so nicely). For the rest he is tastefully upholstered in a short-panted velvet suit, a lace collar and white silk socks. "*Little Lord Fauntleroy*," you murmur to yourself. No, Sir (or Madam), it is ME—or was me, rather. When I was young no girl thought herself properly married unless I was present at the ceremony, got up like a prize rabbit and tethered to the far end of her train. Nowadays I am not so handsome. True, you can urge a horse past me without blindfolding it and all that, but nobody ever mistakes me for Lily Elsie.

Personally I was quite willing to be represented at the National Portrait Gallery by a coloured copy of the presentment described above, but my home authorities thought otherwise, and when last I was in England on leave—shortly after the Battle of Agincourt—they shooed me off to Valpré. "Go to Valpré," they said; "he is *so* artistic." So to Valpré I went, and was admitted by a hand-

maid who waved a white hand vaguely towards a selection of doors, murmuring, "Wait there, please." I opened the nearest door at a venture and entered.

In the waiting-room three other handmaids were at work on photographs. One was painting dimples on a lady's cheek ; one filling in gaps in a Second Lieutenant's moustache ; one straightening the salient of a stock-broker's waistcoat. Presently the first handmaid reappeared and somewhat curtly (I was waiting in the wrong room, it seemed) informed me that the Master was ready. So I went upstairs to the operating theatre. After an impressive interval a curtain was thrust aside and the Master entered. He was not in the least like the artist of my first photograph, who had chirruped and done tricks with an indiarubber monkey to make me prick my ears and appear sagacious. This man had the mane of a poodle, a plush smoking-jacket with rococo trimmings, satin cravat, rings and bangles like the lads in *La Bohème*, and I knew myself to be in the presence of True Art, and bowed my head.

At the sight of me he winced visibly ; didn't seem to like my looks at all. However he pulled himself together and advanced to reconnoitre. He pushed me into a chair, manipulated some screws at the back, and I found my head fast in a steel clamp. I pleaded for gas or cocaine, but he took no notice and prowled off to the far end of the theatre to observe if distance would lend any enchantment. Apparently it would not. The more he saw of me the less he seemed to admire the view.

Suddenly the fire of inspiration lit his eye and he came for me. I struggled with the clamp, but it clave like a bull-terrier to a mutton chop. In a moment he had me by the head and started to

mould it nearer to his heart's desire with plump powerful hands. He crammed half my lower jaw into my breast pocket, pinned my ears back so tightly that they wouldn't wag for weeks, pressed my nose down with his thumb as though it were the button of an electric bell and generally kneaded my features from the early Hibernian to the late Græco-Roman. Then, before they could rebound to their normal positions, he had sprung back, jerked the lanyard and fired the camera.

Some weeks later the finished photographs arrived. The handmaids had done their bit, and the result was a pleasing portraiture, an *objet d'art*, an ornament to anybody's family album. The man Valpré was an artist all right.

A few days ago the Skipper whistled me into the orderly room. His table was littered with parade states, horse-registers and slips of card-board, all intermingled. The Skipper himself appeared to be undergoing some heavy mental disturbance. His forehead was furrowed, his *toupet* rumpled, and he sucked his fountain-pen, unconsciously imbibing much dark nourishment.

"Identification cards," he explained, indicating the slips. "Got to carry 'em now. Comply with Italian regulations. Been trying to describe you. Napoo." He prodded the result towards me. I scanned it and decided he had got it mixed with horse-registers. It read as follows :—

Born	.	.	.	Yes.
Height	.	.	.	17 hands.
Hair	.	.	.	Bay.
Eyes	.	.	.	Two.
Nose	.	.	.	Undulating.
Moustache	.	.	.	Hogged.
Complexion	.	.	.	Natural.
Special Marks	.	.	.	

The Skipper pointed to the blank space. "That's what I want to know—special marks. Got any? Snip, blaze, white fetlock, anything?"

"Yessir," said I. "Strawberry patch on off gaskin."

He sucked thoughtfully at his fountain pen. "Mmph," he said, "shouldn't mention it if I were you. Don't want to have to undress in the middle of the street every time you meet an Intelligence, do you?" I agreed that I did not—not before June, anyhow. The Skipper turned to the card again and frowned.

"Couldn't call it a speaking likeness exactly, this little pen-picture of you, could one? If you only had a photograph of yourself now."

"I have, Sir," said I brightly.

"Good Lord, man, why didn't you say so before? Here, take this and paste the thing in. Now trot away."

I trotted away and pasted Valpré's *objet d'art* on to the card.

Yesterday evening Albert Edward and I were riding out of a certain Italian town (no names, no pack drill). Albert Edward got involved in a right-of-way argument between five bullock wagons and two lorries, and I jogged on ahead. On the fringe of the town was a barrier presided over by a brace of Carabinieri heavily caparisoned with war material, whiskers and cocked hats of the style popularised by Bonaparte. Also an officer. As I moved to pass the barrier the officer spied me and, not liking my looks (as I hinted before, nobody does), signed to me to halt. Had I an identification card, please? I had and handed it to him. He took the card and ran a keen eye over the Skipper's little pen-picture and Valpré's "Portrait Study," then over their alleged original.

"Lieutenant," said he grimly, "these don't tally. This is not you."

I protested that it was. He shook his head with great conviction. "Never! The nose in this photograph is straight; the ears retiring; the jaw, normal. While with you—— [Continental politeness restrained him.] Lieutenant, you must come with me."

He beckoned to a Napoleonic corporal, who approached, clanking his war material. I saw myself posed for a firing squad at grey dawn and shivered all over. I detest early rising.

By this time the corporal had outflanked me, clanking more munitions, and I was on the point of being marched off to the Bastille, or whatever they call it, when Albert Edward suddenly insinuated himself into the party and addressed himself to the officer. "Half a minute, Mongsewer [any foreigner is Mongsewer to Albert Edward]. The photograph is of him all right, but it was taken before his accident."

"His accident?" queried the officer.

"Yes," said Albert Edward; "sad affair, shell-shock. A crump burst almost in his face, and shocked it all out of shape. Can't you see?"

The Italian leaned forward and subjected my flushed features to a piercing scrutiny; then his dark eyes softened almost to tears, and he handed me back my card and saluted.

"Sir, you have my apologies—and sympathy. Good evening."

"Albert Edward," said I, as we trotted into the dusk, "you may be a true friend but you are no gentleman."

XIV

LIONEL TRELAWNEY

LIONEL TRELAWNEY MOLYNEUX-MOLYNEUX was of the race of the Beaux. Had he flourished in the elegant days, Nash would have taken snuff with him, D'Orsay wine—no less. As it was, the high priests of Savile Row made obeisance before him, the staff of the *Tailor and Cutter* penned leaders on his waistcoats, and the lilies of the field whined "Kamerad" and withered away.

When war broke out Lionel Trelawney issued from his comfortable chambers in St. James's and took a hand in it. He had no enthusiasm for blood-letting. War, he maintained from the first, was a vulgar pastime, a comfortless revolting state of affairs which bored one stiff, forced one to associate with all sorts of impossible people and ruined one's clothes. Nevertheless the West-end had to be saved from an invasion of elastic-sided boots, celluloid dickeys, Tyrolese hats and musical soup-swallowing. That was *his* war-aim.

Through the influence of an aunt at the War Office he obtained a commission at once, and after a month's joining-leave (spent closeted with his tailor) he appeared, a shining figure, in the Mess of the Loamshire Light Infantry and with them adventured to Gallipoli. It is related that during the hell of that first landing, when boats were capsizing, wounded men being dragged under

tentacles of barbed wire, machine-guns whipping the sea to bloody froth, Lionel Trelawney was observed standing on a prominent part of a barge, his eyeglass fixed on his immaculate field boots, petulantly remarking, "And now, damn it, I suppose I've got to get wet!"

After the evacuation the battalion went to France, but not even the slush of the salient or the ooze of Festubert could dim his splendour. Whenever he got a chance he sat down, cat-like, and licked himself. Wherever he went his batman went also, hauling a sackful of cleaning gear and changes of raiment. On one occasion, hastening to catch the leave train, he spurred his charger into La Bassée Canal. He emerged, like some river deity, profusely decorated in chick-weed, his eyeglass still in his eye ("Came up like a blinking U-boat," said a spectator, "periscope first"), footed it back to billets and changed, though it cost him two days of his leave.

He was neither a good nor a keen officer. He was not frightened—he had too great a contempt for war to admit the terror of it—but he gloomed and brooded eternally and made no effort to throw the faintest enthusiasm into his job. Yet for all that the Loamshires suffered him. He had his uses—he kept the men amused. In that tense time just before an attack, when the minute hand was jerking nearer and nearer to zero, when nerves were strung tight and people were sending anxious inquiries after Lewis guns, S.A.A., stretchers, bombs, etc., Lionel Trelawney would say to his batman, "Have you got the boot and brass polish, the Blanco, the brushes? Sure?" (a sigh of relief). "Very well, *now* we'll be getting on," and so would send his lads scrambling over the parapet grinning from east to west.

"Where's 'ole Collar and Cuffs?" some muddy warrior would shout after a shrieking tornado of shell had swept over them. "Dahn a shell-hole cleanin' his teef," would come the answer, and the battered platoon chuckled merrily. "'E's a card, 'e is," said his Sergeant admiringly. "Marched four miles back to billets in 'is gas-mask, perishin' 'ot, all because he'd lost 'is razor an' 'adn't shaved for two days. 'E's a nut, 'e is, and no error."

It happened that the Loamshires were given a job of crossing Mr. Hindenburg's well-known ditch and taking a village on the other side. A company of tanks, which came rolling out of the dawn-drizzle, spitting fire from every crack, put seven sorts of wind up the Landsturmer gentlemen in possession; and the Loamshires, getting their first objectives with very light casualties, trotted on for their second in high fettle, sterns up and wagging proudly. The tanks went through the village knocking chips off the architecture and pushing over houses that got in the way; and the Loamshires followed after, distributing bombs among the cellars.

The consolidation was proceeding when Lionel Trelawney sauntered on the scene, picking his way delicately through the débris of the main street. He lounged up to a group of Loamshire officers, yawned, told them how tired he was, cursed the drizzle for dimming his buttons and strolled over to a dug-out with the object of sheltering there. He got no further than the entrance, for as he reached it a wide-eyed German came scrambling up the steps and collided with him, bows on. For a full second the two stood chest to chest gaping, too surprised to move. Then the Hun turned and bolted. But this time Lionel Trelawney was not too bored to act. He drew his revolver and rushed

after him like one possessed, firing wildly. Two shots emptied a puddle, one burst a sandbag, one winged a weather-cock and one went just anywhere. His empty revolver caught the flying Hun in the small of the back as he vaulted over a wall; and Lionel Trelawney vaulted after him.

"Molly's gone mad," shouted his amazed brother-officers as they scrambled up a ruin for a better view of the hunt. The chase was proceeding full-cry among the small gardens of the main street. It was a stirring spectacle. The Hun was sprinting for dear life, Lionel Trelawney hard on his brush, yelping like a frenzied fox-terrier. They plunged across tangled beds, crashed through crazy fences, fell head over heels, picked themselves up again and raced on, wheezing like punctured bagpipes.

Heads of Atkinses poked up everywhere. "S'welp me if it ain't 'ole Collar and Cuffs! Go it, Sir, that's the stuff to give 'em!" A Yorkshireman opened a book and started to chant the odds, but nobody paid any attention to him. The Hun, badly blown, dodged inside a shattered hen-house. Lionel Trelawney tore up handfuls of a ruined wall and bombed him out of it with showers of brick-bats. Away went the chase again, cheered by shrill yoicks and cat-calls from the spectators.

Suddenly there was an upheaval of planks and brick-dust, and both runners disappeared.

"Gone to ground, down a cellar," exclaimed the brother-officers. "Oh, look! Fritz is crawling out."

The white terrified face of the German appeared on the ground level, then with a wriggle (accompanied by a loud noise of rending material) he dragged his body up and was on his way once more. A second later Lionel Trelawney was up as

well, waving a patch of grey cloth in his hand. "Molly's ripped the seat out of his pants," shouted the grand-stand. "Yow, tear 'm, Pup!" "Good ole Collar and Cuffs!" chorused the Loamshire Atkinses.

Lionel Trelawney responded nobly; he gained one yard, two yards, five, ten. The Hun floundered into a row of raspberry canes, tripped and wallowed in the mould. Trelawney fell on him like a Scot on a threepenny bit and they rolled out of sight locked in each other's embrace.

The Loamshires jumped down from their crazy perches and doubled to see the finish, guided by the growlings, grunts, crashing of raspberry canes and jets of garden mould flung sky-high. They were too late, however. They met the victor propelling the remains of the vanquished up a lane towards them. His fawn breeches were black with mould, his shapely tunic shredded to ribbons; his sleek hair looked like a bird's-nest; his nose listed to starboard; one eye bulged like a shuttered bow-window; his eye-glass was not. But the amazing thing about it was that he didn't seem to mind; he beamed, in fact, and with a cheery shout to his friends—"Merry little scamper—eh, what?"—he drop-kicked his souvenir a few yards further on, exclaiming, "That'll teach you to slop soup over my shirt-front, you rude fellow!"

"Soup over your shirt-front!" babbled the Loamshires. "What are you talking about?"

"Talking about?" said Lionel Trelawney. "Why, this arch-ruffian used to be a waiter at Claritz's, and he shed mulligatawny all over my glad-rags one night three years ago—aggravated me fearfully."

XV

THE BOOBY TRAP

A GENEROUS foe, the soul of chivalry, I am always ready to admit that the Boche has many good points. For instance, he is—er—er—oh, well, I can't think of any particular good point just for the moment. On the other hand, it must be admitted that he has his bad ones also, and one of these is that he cannot stand success ; he is the world's worst winner.

Never does he pull off one of these "victorious retreats" of his but he needs must spoil the effect by leaving behind all sorts of puerile booby traps, butter-slides, etc., for the annoyance of the on-sweeping vanquished, displaying a state of mind which is usually slipped out of one at a dame school.

Most of his practical jokes are of the fifth of November order and detonate by means of a neat arrangement of springs, wire and acid contained in a small metal cylinder.

You open a door and the attached house blows away all round it, leaving the door in your damaged hand. You step on a duckboard ; something goes bang ! and the duckboard ups and hits you for a boundary to leg—and so on, all kinds of diversions.

Of course you don't really open doors and prance on duckboards ; that's only what he (Jerry) in his simple faith imagines you will do. In reality

you revive memories of the days when as a small boy you tied trip-strings in dark passages and balanced water-jugs on door-tops; and all the Boche's elementary parlour-tricks immediately become revealed unto you.

Not long ago the Hun, thirsting for yet more imperishable laurels, made a sudden masterly manoeuvre towards the East. Our amateur Staff instantly fell into the trap, and when battle joined again we found we had been lured twenty miles nearer Germany.

The Hun had not left things very comfortable for us; most of the cover had been blown up, and there was the usual generous provision of booby-traps lying about dumbly pleading to be touched off. However, we sheltered in odd holes and corners, scrouged about for what we could "souvenir" and made ourselves as snug as possible.

It was while riding out alone on one of these souveniring expeditions that our William came upon a chaff-cutter standing in what had once been the stable yard of what had once been a château. Now to a mounted unit a chaff-cutter is a thing of incredible value. It is to us what a mincing-machine is to the frugal housewife.

Our own cutter was with the baggage, miles away in the rear, and likely to remain there.

William slipped off his horse and approached the thing gingerly. It was a Boche engine, evidently quite new and in excellent trim. This was altogether too good to be true; there must be a catch somewhere. William withdrew twenty yards and hurled a brick at it—two, three, four bricks. Nothing happened. He approached again and tying one end of a wrecked telephone wire to it, retired behind a heap of rubble and tugged.

The chaff-cutter rocked to and fro and finally fell over on its side without anything untoward occurring. William, wiping beads from his brow, came out of cover. There was no catch in it after all. It was a perfectly genuine bit of treasure-trove. The Skipper would pat his curly head, say "Good boy," and exalt him above all the other subalterns. *Bon—very bon!*

But how to get it home? For you cannot carry full-grown chaff-cutters about in your breeches pockets. For one thing it spoils the set of your pants. He must get a limber. Yes, but how?

The country was quick with other cavalymen all in the souvenir business. If he left the chaff-cutter in order to fetch a limber, one of them would be sure to snap it up. On the other hand, if he waited for a limber to come trotting up of its own sweet will he might conceivably wait for the rest of the War. Limbers (G.S. Mule) are not fairy coaches.

Our William was up against it. He plunged his hands into his tunic-pockets and commenced to stride up and down, thinking to the best of his ability.

In pocketing his right hand he encountered some hard object. On drawing the object forth he discovered it to be his mother's gift. William's mother, under the impression that her son spends most of his time lying wounded and starving out in No-man's-land, keeps him liberally supplied with tabloid meals to sustain him on these occasions—herds of bison corralled into one lozenge, the juice of myriad kine concentrated in a single capsule. This particular gift was of peppermints (warranted to assuage thirst for weeks on end). But it was not the peppermints that engaged

William's young fancy ; it was the container, small, metal, cylindrical.

His inspiration took fire. He set the tin under the chaff-cutter, chopped off a yard of telephone wire, buried one end in peppermints, twisted the other about the leg of the cutter, mounted his horse and rode for dear life.

When he returned with the limber an hour later, he found three cavalymen, two horse-guns and a transportee grouped at a respectful radius round the chaff-cutter, daring each other to jerk the wire.

When William stepped boldly forward and jerked the wire they all flung themselves to earth and covered their heads. When nothing happened and he coolly proceeded to load the cutter on the limber they all sat up again and took notice.

When he picked up the tin and offered them some peppermints they mounted their horses and rode away.

XVI

THE PHANTOM ARMY

I CAN readily believe that war as performed by Messieurs our ancestors was quite good fun. You dressed up in feathers and hardware—like something between an Indian game-cock and a tank—and caracoled about the country on a cart-horse, kissing your hand to balconies and making very liberal expenses out of any fat (and unarmed) burgesses that happened along.

With the first frost you went into winter quarters—i.e. you turned into the most convenient castle and whiled away the dark months roasting chestnuts at a log fire, entertaining the ladies with quips, conundrums and selections on the harpsichord, and vying with the jester in the composition of Limericks.

The profession of arms in those spacious days was both pleasant and profitable. Nowadays it is neither ; it is a dreary *mélange* of mud, blood, boredom and blue-funk (I speak for myself).

Yet even it, miserable calamity that it is (or was), has produced its piquant situations, its high moments ; and one manages to squeeze a sly smile out of it all, here and there, now and again.

I have heard the skirl of the Argyll and Sutherland battle-pipes in the Borghese Gardens and seen a Highlander dance the sword-dance before applauding Rome. I have seen the love-locks of a matinée idol being trimmed with horse-clippers (weep, O ye flappers of Suburbia !) and a Royal Academician set to whitewash a pig-sty. I have

seen American aviators in spurs, Royal Marines a-horse, and a free-born Australian eating rabbit. All these things have I seen.

And of high moments I have experienced plenty of late, for it has been my happy lot to be in the front of the hunt that has swept the unspeakable Boche back off a broad strip of France and Belgium, and the memory of the welcome accorded to us, the first British, by the liberated inhabitants will remain with us until the last "Lights Out." The procedure was practically the same throughout.

There would come a crackle of wild rifle-fire from the front of a village; then, as we worked round to the flank, a dozen or so blue-cloaked Uhlans would scamper out of the rear and disappear at a non-stop gallop for home. In a second the street would be full of people, emptying out of houses and cellars, pressing about us, shaking hands, kissing us and our horses even, smothering us with flowers, cheering "*Vivent les Anglais!*" "*Vive la France!*" clamouring, laughing, crying, mad with joy.

Grandmères would appear at attic windows waving calico tricolours (hidden for four long years) while others plastered up tricolour hand-bills—" *Hommage à nos Libérateurs*," "God's blessings unto Tommy."

However, touching and delightful though it all might be, it was not getting on with the war; this *embarras des amis* was saving the Uhlans' hide.

Furthermore, though I can bring myself to bear with a certain amount of embracing from attractive young things, I do not enjoy the salutations of unshorn old men; and when Mayors and Corporations got busy my native modesty rebelled, and I would tear myself loose and, with my steed

decorated from ears to croup with flowers, so that I looked more like a perambulating hothouse than a poor soldier-man, take up the pursuit once more.

In due course we came to the considerable town of X. All happened as before. As we popped in at one flank the bold Uhlan popped out at the other, and the townsfolk flooded the streets. I was dragged out of the saddle, kissed, pump-handled and cheered while my bewildered charger was led aside and festooned with pink roses. Tricolours appeared at every window; handbills of welcome were distributed broadcast. The Mayor and Corporation arrived at the double, and we struggled together for some moments while they rasped me with their stubbly beards. When the first wild ecstasies had somewhat abated I gathered my troop and prepared to move again.

"Whither away?" the Mayor enquired, a fine old veteran he, wearing two 1870 medals and the ribbon of the Legion.

"To Z.," said I.

"*Ecoulez, donc,*" he warned. "They are waiting for you there in force, machine-guns and cannon."

I intimated that nevertheless I must go and have a look-see, at any rate, and so rode out of town, the vast crowd accompanying us to the outskirts cheering, shouting advice, warnings and blessings. In sight of Z. we shed our floral tributes and, debouching off the highway into the open, worked forwards on the look-out for trouble.

It came. A dozen pip-squeaks shrilled overhead to cause considerable casualties among some neighbouring cabbages, and shortly afterwards rifle-fire opened from outlying cottages. I swung round and tried for an opening to the north, but a couple of machine-guns promptly gave tongue on that flank. Another flock of pip-squeaks kicked

up the mould in front of us and some fresh rifles and machine-guns joined in. Too hot altogether.

I was just deciding to give it best and cut for cover when all hostile fire suddenly switched off, and a few minutes later I beheld light guns on lorries, machine-guns in motor-cars and Uhlans on horses stampeding out of the village by all roads east.

The day was mine. Yip, Yip! Bonza! Skookum! Hurroosh! Nevertheless I was properly bewildered, for it was absurd to suppose that an overwhelming force of heavily-armed Huns could have been bluffed out of a strong position by the merest handful of unsupported cavalry. Manifestly absurd!

I turned about, and in so doing my eye lit on the poplar-lined highway from X., and I understood. Along the road poured the hordes of an advancing army, advancing in somewhat irregular column of route, with banners flying. The head of the column was not a mile distant. The Infantry must be on my heels, thought I. Stout marching! I grabbed up my glasses, took a long look and bellowed with laughter. It was not the Infantry at all; it was the liberated population of X., headed by the Mayor and Corporation, come out to see the fun, the *grandmères* and *grandpères*, the girls and boys, the dogs and babies, marching, hobbling, skipping, toddling down the *pavé*, waving their calico tricolours and singing the *Marseillaise*. I thought of the Boche fleeing eastward with the fear of God in his soul, and rolled about in my saddle drunk with joy.

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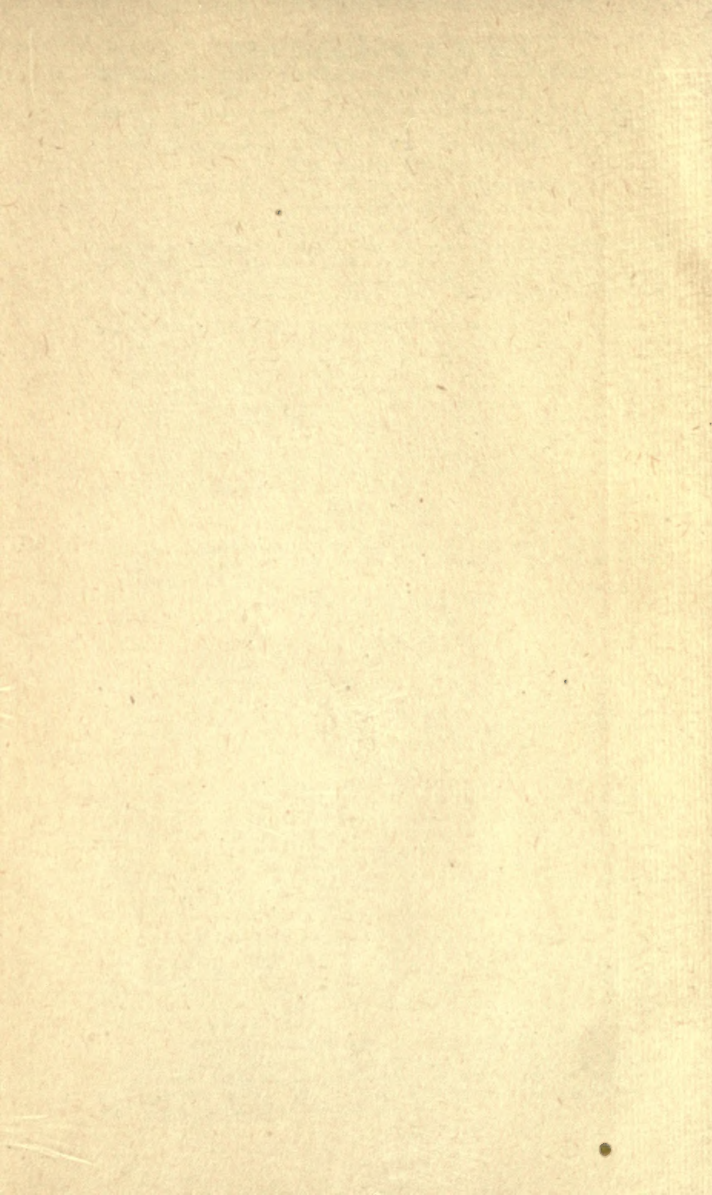
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